

FROM SMALL SCHOOL TO LARGE SCHOOL:  
STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENCE

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**From Small School to Large School: Students'  
Perceptions of Their Experience.**

A Thesis

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
Master of Education

By  
Chris Vincent

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a qualitative study of the transition of students from a small school to a large school. Interviews were done with ten graduating students who had attended a small school for their kindergarten to grade nine years. They were then bused to a large high school for their high school education. This study explores the nature of that transition from their point of view.

The students related memories of a close, friendly atmosphere where they received a lot of individual attention in the small school. They contrasted that with a more formal atmosphere and lack of individual attention in the large school. Students related problems of adjusting academically and socially in the large school. They stated that they felt some discrimination against them in the large school, found the bus trip difficult, and had great difficulty with getting involved in extra-curricular activities.

The students felt that they had been as well prepared for high school as their classmates from the large school, and stated that they had done well in high school. All students felt that they would have gotten better academic grades in the small school, if they could have done high school there, but would have had a more restricted list of course offerings to choose from. However, nine of the ten stated that in retrospect they would choose to go to the large school again, because they felt that due to the

diversity of its academic and social offerings it prepared them better for post-secondary education.

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I acknowledge Earl and Annie Vincent, my parents, for instilling in me a value for education and encouraging, supporting, and sometimes pushing me in my efforts to develop skills and acquire knowledge.

Central to this study was a group of ten students who had gone through a transition from a small school to a large school. Their willingness to give up their time to talk about their experiences made it possible to do this study. For that I am grateful to them. I also thank the superintendent of the school district and the principal of the school where the study took place for their kind permission to proceed with the study.

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

### *Small schools*

It appears as if educators cannot agree on what constitutes a small school. There seems to be as many definitions of small schools as there are educational jurisdictions. Beckner and O'Neal (1980) pointed out that there is a tremendous variation between recommended school sizes across American jurisdictions. Huling (1980) saw any school with less than three hundred and fifty students as a small school. Horn (1991), in a study of rural/small school effectiveness, studied schools with populations of less than one thousand students from kindergarten to grade twelve. Galton and Patrick (1990), in studying small schools, chose primary schools with less than one hundred students. In Newfoundland and Labrador a small school is defined as one which has a mean grade enrolment of twelve or less, or, for a school where any senior high school courses are provided, where the mean grade enrolment is twenty five or less (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1987).

In an examination of the push to consolidate small schools in the United States, Sher and Tompkins (1977) identified strengths of small schools. They stated that small schools provide such advantages as, "local control; close relations among professionals, parents, students, and community; and the opportunity for many more students to

participate in school activities at a more meaningful level" (p. 57). They continued with a literature review citing several studies (White and Tweeten, 1973; Cohn, 1968; Krietlow, 1971; Coleman, Jencks, and others, 1966; Raymond, 1968; Kiesling, 1968; Hirsch, 1959; & Sewell and Haller, 1964) which had shown that large schools cannot be proven to provide: better quality of facilities, equipment, and learning opportunities; better preparation for post-secondary education; and higher participation rates in extra-curricular activities. Further, they pointed out that students had more frequent leadership opportunities in small schools than in larger schools, due to small numbers creating more dependence on a larger proportion of the student population.

There are also those who contend that small schools have many disadvantages. Levin and Marshall (1985) pointed out that small schools do not have as many facilities as large schools. Beckner and O'Neal (1980) contended that small schools: cost more to operate; have more limited curriculum offerings; have difficulties in acquiring and maintaining qualified staff; experience a negative attitude towards the multi-grade organization; and provide limited social opportunity to contact people of different backgrounds.

Multi-grading is an important feature of small, rural schools. Mulcahy (1993) stated that "multi-grading is the single, most pervasive, shared curricular characteristic of small, rural schools not only in Newfoundland and Labrador

but all over the world" (p. 5). Galton and Patrick (1990) also reported finding multi-grading in every small school in their study. Because of this close link between small schools and multi-grade classrooms it is important in this study to look at the multi-grade phenomenon.

Negative feelings about multi-grade classrooms are prevalent among parents, students, teachers, and principals (Gajadharsingh, 1991; & Mulcahy, 1993). Veenman, Voeten, and Lem (1987) found that parents felt that students in mixed-age classes would not achieve as well, academically, as students in single-grade classes. In a submission to a 1990 Royal Commission on Education in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Newfoundland Teachers' Association advocated elimination of small schools and multi-grade classrooms wherever possible. It is clear that many people associated with education have strong feelings about multi-grade classrooms, and they are usually negative.

In small schools multi-grade classrooms continue to be seen as an administrative necessity rather than a viable educational organization. Gajadharsingh (1991) found that the reasons given by principals and superintendents for combining grades were based on short term administrative considerations, such as enrolment, balancing class sizes, budget constraints, and use of available resources, rather than long term pedagogical considerations. Compounding those problems is the lack of curriculum materials designed for



multi-grade classrooms. Mulcahy (1993) stated that "Curriculum design, instructional development, and pre-service and in-service teacher education have generally proceeded as if small schools with their unique needs and characteristics did not exist" (p.1). According to Gajadharsingh (1991) over eighty percent of small school teachers have no specialized training in teaching multi-grades, and use the regular single-grade curriculum in their classrooms. This points to a feeling among all stakeholders in education that the educational process in small schools is inferior to that in large schools.

It appears as if educators are divided as to whether small schools are educationally viable. Some have argued that small schools cannot provide the facilities and services needed by students, while others maintain that close feelings between school and community, and increased opportunities for student involvement in activities more than compensate for the shortcomings of small schools.

### ***Small schools in Newfoundland and Labrador***

Newfoundland and Labrador is a predominantly rural province with its economy based primarily on the fishery. Such an economy has dictated that settlement be spread widely along the coast. Until recent years most rural communities were isolated, which meant that they had to be self-sufficient with respect to providing services such as

education. This meant that no matter how small the community it had its own, usually one or two room, school in which children of all ages were educated together. The fact that schools were run by individual religious denominations contributed to keeping schools small, since each community had as many schools as religious denominations.

Since the 1960's construction of road links for many of the small rural communities made it possible to bus students to larger centralized schools, where single-grade classrooms were possible. In the late 1960's small schools with multi-grade classrooms were viewed unfavourably from an educational and economic viewpoint, and a large scale attempt to eliminate them was begun (Doody, 1990). According to Mulcahy (1993) some school boards at the time portrayed small schools as sub-standard and inferior in their push for consolidation and larger schools. As a result, in recent years small schools and multi-grade classrooms are seen as an artifact of the past by most teachers, and are rarely mentioned in teacher training (Mulcahy, 1993). In spite of that, due to the denominational education system and great distances between some communities, many communities continue to operate one or more small schools.

According to the definition given earlier for Newfoundland and Labrador there were one hundred and seventy eight small schools in this province in the 1992-1993 school year (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1993). With

five hundred and one schools in Newfoundland and Labrador small schools approximate thirty five percent of its schools. Indications are that those numbers will increase in the near future unless many schools are consolidated. Press (1990) stated that Newfoundland's school enrolment has declined by 44 000 since the 1971-72 school year, and is presently declining by approximately 3000 a year. He also projected that by the year 2000 there will be only 100 000 students enrolled in our schools, and the birth rate will be fewer than 6000 per year. Combined with present economic constraints, and possible further depopulation due to the fisheries failure, such realities can only point to further downsizing of schools and expansion of multi-grade classrooms in this province. Mulcahy (1993) stated that multi-grade classrooms are a rural phenomenon in this province, but Gajadharsingh's (1991) findings that nationally it is an urban phenomenon could point to eminent multi-grade classroom development in urban areas in this province.

If we are bound for further increases in the numbers of small schools and multi-grade classrooms, we must turn our attention to developing programs and teaching strategies for that teaching organization. Since such a sizable number of our students attend small schools it would be in those students' interest to identify the positive aspects of such schools and utilize them in making the school experience as efficient and profitable for students as possible. Educators

should be able to cite better reasons for the existence of small schools than administrative expedience, and resources should be turned to developing curricular materials specifically designed for such schools. Before doing so information must be gathered on the strengths and weaknesses of small schools. It seems reasonable that a good beginning point for gathering such information would be from students who have attended both small and large schools during their school careers.

#### *Focus of the study*

The focus of this study is the transitional experiences of students who have gone through a move from a small school to a large school. This study explores the nature of the transitional experience from the perspective of the students involved.

Efforts to consolidate schools in Newfoundland and Labrador have led to decapitation of many community schools. This means that in communities where small, all grade schools once existed the high school students are now being bused to larger centres, where they can attend large consolidated high schools. It is believed that in such schools they can be provided with higher quality facilities and equipment, and be given a broader range of course choices (Doody, 1990). This leaves students attending very small schools for their early schooling and much larger schools for high school.

Such a move from a small school, where students spend as much as their first ten years of schooling, to a large school could necessitate a tremendous adjustment for students. If there is a substantial difference between the atmospheres in small schools and large schools it could be expected that the transition would pose problems for the students.

This study used interviews with ten students, who have experienced the transition from a small school to a large school, to explore their perceptions of the transitional experience. In the interviews the participants were asked to relate their memories of life in the small school, their perceptions of the large school in their first year there, and their perceptions of the differences between large and small schools. They were asked to elaborate on any problems which they found associated with attending the large school. They were asked such questions as:

1. What do you remember of life in the small school?
2. When you graduated from the small school would you have chosen to remain there for high school if that choice had been offered?
3. While in the small school what stories did you hear about life in the large school?
4. What were your impressions of the large school on your first day there?
5. What adjustments did you have to make in your first year in the large school?

6. Do you think you had been well prepared for high school by the small school?
7. How do you think your academic skills compared to those of students from the large school in your first year there?
8. How did you fit in socially in your first year in the large school?
9. Did you feel any discrimination against you, either socially or academically, in the large school?
10. How much did you participate in extra-curricular activities in the large school, and why or why not?
11. How did you find the bus trip to the large school?
12. What did you miss about the small school while you were attending the large school?
13. What advice would you give new students entering the large school from the small school?
14. If given the opportunity again would you choose to attend the large school for your high school years, in light of your present experiences?

#### ***Definition of terms***

Achievement - Student performance in terms of high school grades, drop out rates, social contribution to the school, and participation in post-secondary education.

Grades - The average of final grades given for each high school course.

Drop out rate - The percentage of students who leave school, for any reason other than death, before graduation.

Social contribution to the school - Participation in school organizations, clubs, committees, and sports.

Post-secondary participation - Entrance into a post-secondary educational institution after completion of high school.

Multi-grade classroom - Any classroom where more than one grade is taught at any one time.

Single-grade classroom - Any classroom where only one grade is taught at any one time.

Small school - Any school with less than twelve students per grade.

Rural school - Any school serving an area of less than five thousand people.

Double grade - A classroom in which two grade levels is being taught at the same time.

Combined class - Any classroom where students of more than one age work together for the purpose of learning.

Vertical grouping - Any situation where students of more than one age are grouped together for the purpose of learning.

Non-graded class - Any class where students work at the level of their ability in learning and progress according to their individual work.

### ***Purpose of the study***

It seems that many stakeholders in the education process feel very strongly that the small school, multi-grade organization for teaching and learning is inferior to the large school, single-grade organization. If this is accurate then students who receive their primary, elementary, and junior high education in a small school with multi-grade classrooms should be inferior in their level of academic achievement and find it very difficult to adjust to the large school situation, with single-grade classrooms. It could be reasonably expected that those students would find the transition difficult and that their academic achievement and social adjustment would suffer. Their self-concept could also be affected negatively, further compounding their difficulties.

Students who have experienced this transition from a small school to a larger school could provide very important insights into this situation. There are a small number of school situations which present an opportunity to study this phenomenon in this province. One such school system, where students are bused to a central high school after grade nine, has been used for this study. Students who are presently in their graduating year, and who came from the small primary-junior high school, may be able to provide us with information and ideas, based on their experiences, which will help us provide an easier transition for future students in



the same situation. The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of the experience of moving from a small school to a large school from the students' perspective. The central concern in this inquiry is the students' perceptions of their achievement and participation in the larger school. Of particular interest for this study are the students' views as to the impact of their small school experiences on their later educational achievement.

#### *Limitations of the study*

This study used a qualitative methodology for collecting and reporting the participants' perceptions of the transition from a small school to a large school. The data collecting methodology of choice was individual interviews. When such a methodology is employed it is very time consuming, necessitating study of only small groups. This was appropriate in this study since there were ten students available who had the experience which is being studied, allowing this methodology to be employed. It must be understood that this represents just one small group in one situation, and the results should not be generalized outside of the unique situation being studied. It is also important to note that each participant's experience is unique and may not coincide with the experiences of other participants.

It also must be noted that this study reports only the perceptions and experiences of this group of students. There

is no attempt to validate their perceptions, and no attempt to justify them. The participants' perceptions may exist in reality or only in their imaginations, but however they do exist they represent perceived reality for the participants, govern how the students act, and dictate the quality of their school experiences. Therefore, they provide valuable insights into the nature of the transition from a small school to a large school.

### *Significance of the study*

With studies suggesting to us that small schools are likely to be a reality in Newfoundland and Labrador for the foreseeable future (Press, 1990; and Mulcahy, 1993), it is important for us to increase our knowledge and understanding of how this experience affects students and their subsequent achievement. It is fairly well documented in the literature that being in a small primary/elementary school with multi-grade classrooms does not necessarily have a negative impact on student achievement at that level (Gajadharsingh & Melvin, 1987; Penney, 1992; Brown & Martin, 1989; and Ford, 1977). But what happens subsequently? How do those students perform and participate when they transfer to larger schools? Such knowledge may be used to inform future decision making about the viability of small schools and multi-grade classrooms.

As has been noted by researchers such as Bell and Sigsworth (1987) and Galton and Patrick (1990), there have

been very few attempts to investigate the views of those most directly affected by multi-grading and small schools - the students. No investigations into the transition from a small school to a large school, from the students' perspective, could be found. Hence, this study has the potential to make a unique contribution not only to the understanding of the Newfoundland and Labrador context but to the overall field of small schools research.

## **Chapter 2 - Methodology**

### ***Introduction***

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the theory behind this study, and the procedure which was followed in collecting and reporting on the data. This is a qualitative study and the data is reported in a narrative way, including direct quotations from the participants. It is hoped that such an approach will provide not only the data which was collected, but also a sense of the students' feelings about the transition from a small school to a large school.

### ***Qualitative research***

This study is theoretically based on symbolic interactionism. This theory, as articulated by Blumer (1969), establishes that meaning is given to objects, and events by people, based on their interpretations of the actions of people and groups interacting. This means that reality can change from person to person and group to group depending on how those people and groups interact and the symbolic meaning which they attribute to events and objects. Reality for students may be quite different than reality for teachers, administrators, or parents. Failures or successes perceived by teachers, administrators, and parents may not be seen in the same light by the students who are directly involved. Human interactions and attribution of meanings are

such a complex field of study that it is best suited to study with an open-ended, qualitative approach, which will allow freedom for subjects to express their conceptions of reality.

Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh, (1990) stated that qualitative research takes as a fundamental premise that:

social reality . . . cannot be reduced to variables in the same manner as physical reality, and what is most important in the social disciplines is understanding and portraying the meaning that is constructed by the participants involved in particular social settings or events. (p. 445)

They went on to say that, "Qualitative inquiry seeks to understand human and social behaviour from the 'insider's' perspective . . ." (p. 445). They also made the point that this method of research acknowledges that the perceptions of participants and researchers are highly subjective, and must be considered in the research frame.

Ary et al. (1990) argued that, in contrast, quantitative approaches, which are based on the hypothetical-deductive model of inquiry, "is principally concerned with the discovery of 'social facts' devoid of subjective perceptions or intentions and divorced from particular social and historical contexts" (p. 445). The quantitative inquirer attempts to be objective and to keep his/her values out of the study as much as is possible.

A qualitative method of inquiry was chosen for this study because of its subjective nature. This study is inquiring into students' perceptions of their experiences in making the transition from a small school to a large school.

Each student will have had a different experience, and therefore will have different perceptions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that qualitative methods are better suited to studying multiple realities because they are more sensitive to the shaping influences and value patterns that are encountered by both the researcher and the subjects. A qualitative research design is best suited to considering the surprise, disorder, and contradiction found in a phenomenon (Peshkin, 1987). Justice could not be done to the nature of this inquiry by taking narrow, clinical snapshots of phenomena at fixed points in time. A qualitative approach allows for a more open-ended inquiry, more approximating the nature of the social world in which the students find themselves (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Merriam (1989) contended that qualitative methods have no predetermined hypotheses to limit and direct them, therefore allow discoveries to be made about the phenomenon under investigation.

The data collecting method of choice in this study was open ended questions. Interviews are a principal method used in qualitative research to allow the researcher to become familiar with the participants' point of view (Jacob, 1987). Such interviews allow for interaction between the researcher and the participants. The researcher can ask participants to elaborate on aspects of their experience and explain unclear responses. Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh, (1990) pointed out

that, "The open ended response format permits greater freedom of expression for the respondents and provides a wider range of responses" (p. 419). It was felt by the researcher that in order to gain full insight into the experience of transition from a small school to a large school it was necessary to get a wide range of freely expressed responses from the participants. Verbatim statements from the participants were used extensively in the reporting to present their thoughts as objectively as possible (Jacob, 1988). The participants' responses were structured into themes, issues, and concerns for analysis and discussion.

#### ***Participants in the study***

The participants in this study are ten students who completed their kindergarten to grade nine education in a small school, with a population of one hundred and twenty students. They then proceeded to a large high school, with a population of three hundred and fifty students, for their level one to three studies. At the time of this study the students were completing level three of high school.

The selected students began school as the 1981-82 kindergarten class of the small school, with a total of eighteen students in the class. Of that eighteen, two transferred out of the area and could not be traced, five transferred to school systems other than that being studied, either before high school or for their high school years, two

were accelerated one year and have moved on to university, one fell behind his classmates, one left school early, and seven continued through the school system to arrive at their graduating year in the large school on time. Also found in the 1994 graduating class at the large school were two students who had transferred to the small school after having begun their schooling in another, similar, school in the small community, and one student who had attended the small school one year in advance of the class being studied, but remained in the large high school for an additional year. This left ten students who had experienced both the small school and the large school in the graduating class of the large school in 1994. These ten students were eighteen or nineteen years of age and the group consisted of eight males and two females. They all resided in the small community where they had attended the small school.

This group was selected because they had the experience of both types of school, and sufficient experience in the high school to be able to reflect on their schooling and draw conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of each. It was felt that they were far enough removed from any "honeymoon effect" of attending a new and larger school to give a more reliable perception than those who were in their first year in the high school, and had sufficient high school experience to have formed strong opinions. Their perceptions of the first year of their high school experience were



particularly focused on. They were also able to provide information on problems of busing which they had perceived.

### ***The small school***

The small school in this study is located in a small Newfoundland community with a population of approximately one thousand two hundred. This is a rural community with its economy primarily based on the forest industry. In recent years many people have been working in larger surrounding communities. The community is located on a small bay and people live on each side of the bay. Students who live on the side opposite where the schools are located are bused to school. It has two schools of approximately the same size, and which offer very similar programs. The other school in the community was an all grade school until the 1992-1993 school year, when it was reduced to a kindergarten to grade nine school. The school being studied has a student population of approximately one hundred students in grades kindergarten to nine. It has eight teachers, including a teaching principal, a half time classroom/half time french teacher, a half time physical education/half time classroom teacher, a special education teacher, and four classroom teachers. This school also has the services of a guidance counsellor for one half day per six day cycle. Multi-grade classrooms are the standard in this school. The usual configuration of classes in the school is kindergarten,

grades one and two, grades three and four, grades five and six, grades seven and eight, and grade nine. This school had a music program which was terminated while the students being studied were attending junior high school, so they did have the benefit of music classes during their primary and elementary years. This school's facilities include a small gymnasium, a multi-purpose room, which serves as a library, a computer room, and a music room, and a room which serves as a laboratory and art room.

After completing grade nine at the small school the students travel by bus, thirty kilometres each way, to the large school. This journey takes thirty to forty-five minutes, depending on the weather conditions. This requires the students to get up at seven o'clock in the morning for a seven forty-five pick up. They arrive home at approximately three forty-five in the afternoon.

#### *The large school*

The large school in this study is a junior to senior high school, which has a student population of approximately three hundred and fifty in grades seven to level three. This school is located in a small urban centre which has a population of approximately five thousand. This community is a service centre for its surrounding communities and its economic base is tied to the shipping industry. The large school has been serving this community and its surrounding

area for the past thirty three years. Included in its population are students from six small communities with a combined population of approximately five thousand. These communities are economically based on farming, forestry, and fishing. Many people from these communities drive to work in the larger community where the school is located.

The large school has twenty seven teachers, including: a principal; a teaching vice-principal; two physical education teachers; a music teacher; two french teachers; a guidance counsellor; two special education teachers; one teacher for the trainable mentally handicapped; a librarian; a home economics teacher; a technology education teacher; and thirteen classroom and subject teachers. Its organization consists of single-grade classrooms in the junior high section, with two or three classes per grade level, and single course classrooms at the high school level. Its facilities include a large gymnasium, a french room, a music room, a guidance centre, an art room, three laboratories, a computer room, a home economics room, a technology education room, and a library. It offers a wide range of courses to high school students, with sixty nine offered in the 1993-94 school year.

The large school is also fed by a primary through elementary school with a population of approximately three hundred and fifty students, which is located in the small urban centre and serves the same communities as the large

school, except the community where the small school being studied is located. It has a teaching staff of twenty three, including: a principal; a vice-principal; a french teacher; a physical education teacher; a music teacher; two special education teachers; a teacher for the trainable mentally handicapped; a teacher for students with severe multiple handicaps; a learning resources teacher; a part time guidance counsellor; and thirteen classroom teachers. It also has the services of four teacher assistants. This school's organization has either two or three single-grade classes for each grade level. Its facilities include a large gymnasium, a french room, a library, a multi-purpose room, a laboratory, a music room, and a computer room.

The high school students from the small school being studied are added to the large school population for their high school education. This is a unique situation for this study, in that it provides an opportunity to study students who have attended both types of school and have had an opportunity to share classes with students from a different type of background than themselves, so they have a basis for comparison.

#### ***Data collection***

After obtaining school board and school permission to do this study, parents were contacted by mail and telephone. The purpose of the study was explained to them and their

permission was sought to include their children in it. Upon receipt of the parents' permission the students were contacted by letter and telephone and asked to participate. All ten students consented and interview appointments were set up. Each student was asked to meet the interviewer at a time and place convenient for him/her. For convenience most of the interviews were conducted in the small school, which is located in their home community.

Semi-structured individual interviews with each student were used to explore his/her perceptions of his/her school experiences. Questions were posed by the interviewer to initiate discussion and maintain the focus of the interview, but students were encouraged to talk freely about their experiences in the school system. The questions asked were structured, but provided open ended opportunities for students to mention any perceptions which they had on the schooling process they had experienced.

Students were asked their perceptions on three major areas of school life: social participation; academic achievement; and post-secondary aspirations. The interviews were also organized into students' memories of life in the small school, their impressions and perceptions of their first year in the large school, and a reflection on their whole school experience. Each interview took the form of a friendly discussion of the student's school experiences and his/her perceptions of the transition from the small school

to the large school, and lasted for one to one and one half hours. All interviews were audio taped.

### ***Data Analysis***

After completion of the interviews the audio tapes were transcribed. Interview data on students' memories of life in the small school; anticipations of life in the large school; first impressions of the large school; socialization in the large school; participation in extra-curricular activities; perceptions of travelling on the bus; and reflections on their whole school experience were reported in narrative form. Any perceived differences and negative and positive perceptions of the transition from a small school to a large school, in terms of social and academic preparedness for high school, social involvement, and academic achievement, were given particular attention. The transcribed interviews were analyzed and common themes, issues, and concerns of the ten participants were noted. In addition, individual issues and concerns unique to individual students were noted.

### ***Conclusion***

Before proceeding with a study it is important to be familiar with work which has been done in that field, or closely related fields, by other researchers. No studies have been done in the field of student perceptions of the transition from small schools to large schools, but there

have been many done in the field of small schools. The next chapter will explore some of the small schools research, and ideas which have been written about small schools.

## **Chapter 3 - Review of literature**

### ***Introduction***

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate studies and writings which have focused on issues relating to small schools. No studies have been found which focus on the transition from a small school to a large school, from the students' perspective. However, many studies have been done on the strengths and weaknesses of small schools, and they have a direct bearing on the subject of this study. Since multi-grade classrooms are the most pervasive feature of small schools in Newfoundland and Labrador (Mulcahy, 1993), studies on that classroom organization also bear directly on this study.

### ***Small schools***

Due to small numbers of students in small, rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador it was common in the past to find children of many different ages, representing different grade levels, in the same classroom, with one teacher. In the late 1960's small schools with multi-grade classrooms were viewed unfavourably from an educational and economic viewpoint, and a large scale attempt to eliminate them was begun (Doody, 1990). Due to the demographics of this province it is practically impossible to consolidate many such schools, so a large number remain in existence. In



the 1992-1993 school year there was one hundred and seventy eight small schools in this province (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1993). That number represented over one third of the schools in the province. With the existence of such a large number of small schools it is necessary to raise questions about their effectiveness and the quality of services being offered to students who attend them.

Horn (1991) studied small schools in rural areas of Kansas. He determined school effectiveness by student's scores on standardized achievement tests, attainment of college scholarships, percentage of students attending post-secondary educational institutions, and participation in extra-curricular activities. In his definition of achievement he also included development of higher-order thinking skills, socialization, development of good work ethics, and preparation of students for good citizenship. He found that in small schools in Kansas: students participated widely in extra-curriculars; over seventy percent of students intended to pursue post-secondary education; over seventy percent of students reported receiving grades of A or B, with only 1.4% getting D or F; over eighty percent of adult respondents believed extra-curricular activities to be important; all groups questioned perceived that quality indicators were present in their schools; and that those schools had a very low drop-out rate. Questionnaires were

circulated to high school and junior high school students, teachers, building administrators, district superintendents, school board members, and adult community members. He concluded by stating that "students in small/rural schools performed above the state average on all areas of the Kansas competency test, and students pursue post-secondary education at a rate higher than the average for the state" (p. 25). He also stated that there is no evidence to indicate that those schools are doing an inferior job, and evidence points out that they are doing a much better job than average.

Dunne (1977) stated that a small school is much easier to administer than a larger school. It is also much easier for the entire community to get involved with the operation of the school. Renihan and Renihan (1991) also pointed out the ease with which the community can get involved with smaller schools. Beckner and O'Neal (1980) contended that small schools have: closer relations between faculty and administration; less red tape; more participation in decision making by teachers and students; easier change processes; closer parent-teacher relations; and more parental involvement in the school. Levin and Marshall (1985) also stated that smaller schools have higher morale, and students in multi-grade classrooms show better adjustment and attitudes. Beckner and O'Neal (1980) contended that small schools have more sense of community, closer relationships between students and teachers, greater student participation

in extra-curriculars, less discipline problems, and more human contact. Sher and Tompkins (1977) stated that small schools provide such advantages as, "local control; close relations among professionals, parents, students, and community; and the opportunity for many more students to participate in school activities at a more meaningful level" (p. 57). Brimm and Hanson (1980) agreed with that list of advantages of the small school. It seems reasonable that those conditions would exist in small schools, with smaller numbers of teachers and students. Closer relationships and ease of communications should facilitate a closer, more family atmosphere. Such an atmosphere should be good for the overall development of students.

Educators have also pointed out that small schools have many weaknesses. Of the weaknesses most commonly named bureaucratic problems, such as class arrangements and timetabling, are probably the most easily seen at first glance. Levin and Marshall (1985) pointed out that small schools do not have as many facilities as large schools. Beckner and O'Neal (1980) contended that small schools cost more to operate per student; have more limited curriculum offerings; have difficulties in acquiring and maintaining qualified staff; experience a negative attitude towards the multi-grade organization; and provide limited social opportunity to contact people of different backgrounds. Brimm and Hanson (1980) added that small schools often copy

large school practices, which leads to an inferior program. Cross, Leahy, and Murphy (1989) contended that teachers in small schools have a heavier workload than teachers in larger schools. Dunne (1977) stated that lack of teacher training for small schools was a problem. She went on to say that small schools do have problems, but it is better to live with them than to live with a whole new set created by transplanting to a suburban model.

Since multi-grade classrooms are a major feature of small schools (Mulcahy, 1993, and Galton & Patrick, 1990) it is important to examine studies that have been done on that classroom organization.

#### ***Multi-grade classrooms***

Gajadharsingh (1991) defined a multi-grade classroom as one where two or more grade levels have been combined in one classroom with one teacher. Mulcahy (1993) concurred with that definition when defining multi-grade classrooms in Newfoundland and Labrador. In such an arrangement it was most common for students in a particular grade to be seated together, but separated from other grades. Each grade group was taught separately, according to their grade level (Doody, 1990). She also stated that an attempt to cover all mandated curriculum for each grade level was generally made. Mulcahy (1993) contended that there has been a lack of acknowledgement that multi-grade classrooms exist, and

curriculum is being planned for single-grade situations. Gajadharsingh (1991) also made that point when he stated that no curriculum materials exist specifically for multi-grade classrooms, so the regular single-grade curriculum is usually followed. He also stated that this is so because integrating curricula and teaching strategies for multi-grade classrooms are major problems for teachers. This presents a special problem since, he stated, more than eighty percent of multi-grade teachers have no special training in teaching multi-grade classes. He also stated that parents and teachers have negative attitudes towards multi-grade classrooms, with teachers feeling that it places a heavy burden on them and provides students with an inferior education. Veenman, Voeten, and Lem (1987) found that parents felt that students in mixed-age classes would not achieve as well, academically, as students in single-grade classes. Such strong feelings on the part of teachers and parents demand research to see if it has foundation in reality.

It seems that whether the multi-grade classroom is inferior or not their existence will continue in this province. Newfoundland and Labrador remains a predominantly rural province with widely scattered small communities. Adding to that, our denominational education system demands that many small communities have more than one school to serve the religious denominations separately. Compounding that further is a marked decrease in the numbers of children

enrolled in our schools in recent years. Such factors have led twenty-six of twenty-seven school boards in this province to foresee an expansion in the number of multi-grade classrooms in their districts in the near future (Mulcahy, 1993). Gajadharsingh (1991), in a study of multi-grade classrooms in Canada, contended that it is apparent that small schools and multi-grade classrooms are here to stay. If they are here to stay it is imperative that we increase our knowledge of the quality of education that we are providing to the students affected. Study of the multi-grade classroom can also give us insights into how to improve them, and may lead us to improved educational organizations for all of our schooling.

#### ***Achievement in multi-grade classes***

It is of prime importance to investigate Gajadharsingh's (1991) finding that parents, students, teachers, and administrators view multi-grade classrooms as an inferior organization providing students with a sub-standard education. If that is the case studies should show that students in multi-grade classrooms achieve at a much lower rate than students in single-grade classrooms. Many studies have been done in this area, using performance on standardized tests of basic academic skills as indicators, as well as looking at the broader range of student achievement outcomes defined earlier.

Lincoln (1981) used a standardized test of reading ability to compare reading achievement of students who spent their first and second years in school in single-grade classes with that of those who spent their first two years in multi-grade classes. It was found that test scores did not vary significantly, and it was concluded that the multi-grade classroom is a viable alternative to the single-grade classroom, and will not hinder student achievement. Rule (1983), using standardized tests of reading and mathematics skills, determined that the multi-grade classroom does not have a negative effect on reading achievement, but might have a negative effect on mathematics achievement.

Yerry and Henderson (1964) compared multi-grade and single-grade classes on academic achievement, social adjustment, and anxiety levels. They used standardized tests of reading, arithmetic, and english, as well as standardized social acceptance and anxiety scales. They found that there was a slight, but not statistically significant, gain in academic achievement, in favour of the multi-grade class. They reported that students in multi-grade classes are certainly not hampered in academic achievement. No significant difference was found in social acceptance patterns, and no significant difference was found in school anxiety levels. However, they did report less defensiveness in students from the single-grade classroom. They also reported informally that students in the multi-grade class

seemed more satisfied with school, had more breath and richness of experience, were more helpful to others, and seemed to use time more profitably.

Cooper and Engel (1971) reported that there were significant differences in standardized tests of reading and language, with the exception of spelling, in favour of non-graded schools. Macdonald and Wurster (1974), in a study of achievement of primary school students, defined achievement as mean gains on a standardized vocabulary and reading comprehension test, taken from students' accumulated records. They found that there was no significant difference in vocabulary skills or reading comprehension skills of second graders who had spent their first year in a single-grade classroom and those of students who had spent their first year in a multi-grade classroom. After a review of literature on achievement in multi-grade classrooms, as opposed to single-grade classrooms, Gajadharsingh and Melvin (1987) concluded that students in multi-grade classrooms either exceeded or were the same as students in single-grade classrooms, in areas of scholastic achievement. From their review of literature they also reported that students in multi-grade classrooms tend to do better than students in single-grade classrooms in measures of affective development. In their study of elementary children, in which they compared student performance on the Canadian Test of Basic Skills, they found that achievement of students in multi-grade



classrooms was significantly higher than that of students in single-grade classrooms, in vocabulary, reading, math concepts, math problem solving, and math total. Penney (1992) found that there was no significant difference in achievement on the Canadian Test of Basic Skills, between grade six students in multi-grade classrooms and those in single-grade classrooms.

Acheson (1984) reported that students in multi-grade classrooms consistently achieved equally or superiorly to students in single-grade classrooms (cited in Brown & Martin, 1989). Finley and Thompson (1963) found no significant difference between achievement of students in multi-grade classes, as compared to students in single-grade classes (cited in Brown & Martin, 1989). Brown and Martin (1989) did a study in which they looked at grade points, the Canadian Test of Basic Skills, and a teacher survey to compare achievement of students in multi-grade and single-grade classes. They found a slight, but not statistically significant, difference in favour of the multi-grade class. They concluded by stating that they found no evidence to suggest that students in multi-grade classes should not do as well as students in single-grade classes.

Dodendorf (1983) stated that there was no difference in academic performance of students in a five grade multi-grade classroom and students in a single-grade situation (cited in Miller, 1991). Galton and Patrick (1990) found no

discernable trend in differences between achievement in multi-grade and single-grade classes. Wilt (1971) reported that when samples are matched for I.Q. and chronological age multi-age and single-age grouping had no effect on academic achievement (cited in Faust, 1991). Bowman (1979) found no significant difference in self-concept and attitude in students from graded and non-graded schools. He also found that in elementary school there was no significant difference in achievement, but in junior high school there was, in favour of non-graded classes (cited in Faust, 1991).

Chace (1961) studied academic achievement as well as personality and social development in students in multi-grade and single-grade classes. He used standardized tests of academic achievement and questionnaires to parents, teachers, and school administrators to do so. He found a slight, but not statistically significant, advantage in favour of the multi-grade organization for academic achievement, and a slightly significant advantage in personality and social development, in favour of the multi-grade situation. Miller (1991), after a review of thirteen studies, concluded that the multi-grade classroom does not affect academic performance, social relationships, or attitudes, and that measures of affective development show strongly in favour of the multi-grade organization. He concluded by stating that the multi-grade classroom is a viable, and equally effective, organizational alternative to single-grade instruction.

Ford (1977) reported that children in multi-age groups have a better attitude toward school. She further contended that students in multi-age groups seem to have better self-concept, aspirations, feelings of success, and perceptions of parental approval than control groups. Hull (1958) claimed that more learning takes place in the multi-grade class than in the single-grade class. He also stated that students in multi-grade classes show gains in personal adjustment, social maturity, and behaviour characteristics (cited in Buchinger, 1988). Martin and Pavan (1976), in a review of literature, found that when students are matched for I.Q. those in non-graded classes scored significantly higher on standardized tests of achievement than students in single-grade classes. They concluded that "non-graded programs can enhance academic achievement and foster positive attitudes among children" (p. 312).

Veenman et al. (1987), in a study of time on task and achievement in multi-age as opposed to single-age classrooms, pre-tested students with a standardized achievement test and placed them in ability groups. They then observed them for time on task and compared their achievement in a post-test of the standardized test. They concluded that the type of class organization is not associated with student achievement. Students in mixed-age classes did not have significantly less time on task than students in single-age classes, and there

was no significant difference in achievement on the standardized test.

There have been studies which found that single-grade classes achieve at a higher rate than multi-grade classes. Stimson (1992) found that in multi-track, year round schools students learn more in single-grade classrooms than in multi-grade, as measured by standardized tests of reading, mathematics, and language, regardless of sex, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or previous achievement. Foshay (1948) found that students in single-grade classes made significantly greater gains in reading, arithmetic, and language than students in multi-grade classrooms (cited in Gajadharsingh & Melvin, 1987). Fippinger (1967) also found a significant difference in academic achievement in favour of the single-grade classroom (cited in Veenman et al., 1987).

Even though there is no clear indication of one classroom organization being superior in student achievement, it seems that the weight of the evidence points to the conclusion that the multi-grade classroom is not detrimental to student achievement. While some studies indicate that it might be superior there are others that indicate there is no difference, and a few which indicate they may be inferior. It seems from the studies which have been done that students in small schools with multi-grade classrooms are not at a disadvantage compared with students in larger schools with single-grade classrooms. Educators have been arguing the

advantages and disadvantages of each classroom organization, and an examination of their arguments might also help to shed some light on this question.

#### ***Advantages and disadvantages of the multi-grade classroom***

A number of advantages of multi-grade classrooms have been identified by educational researchers. Those advantages can be characterized as bureaucratic efficiency, provision of a broad range of experiences, more flexibility, and better attitudes and self-concept in students.

Hull (1958) claimed that students in multi-grade classes are stimulated to higher achievement by the wide range of experiences and interests that are found in their classroom (cited in Buchinger, 1988). Leight and Rinehart (1992) stated that there is more of a family feeling in a multi-grade classroom. Tait (1992) summed up those ideas by listing the advantages of the multi-grade classroom as: it provides a wide range of skills, strengths, and experiences, which enrich all; older students motivate younger students to do better work; and good behaviour and work habits are modelled by the more mature students. It could also be argued that younger students could learn much from overhearing explanations given to older students by the teacher.

It has also been argued that the multi-grade classroom is more flexible than the single-grade classroom. Bishop

(1982) argued that multi-grade grouping offers more flexibility to have students work at their ability level within the classroom. Cohen (1990) agreed, naming flexibility in grouping as an advantage of the multi-grade classroom. Beckner and O'Neal (1980) concurred, listing advantages of multi-grade classrooms as: a more learner-centred atmosphere; more potential for individualized instruction; and less ability grouping. Also, Leight and Rinehart (1992) contended that the multi-grade classroom provides an opportunity for gifted students to accelerate within their classroom. A relaxed atmosphere where students can work at their level of comfort and competence should enhance learning. It should also be noted that a decrease in labelling of students should be a result of this type of classroom organization. Oberlander (1989) stated that the multi-grade class provides a developmentally appropriate environment for students without rejection or separation from peers.

A number of studies have reported better attitudes and self-concept in students from multi-grade classrooms. Cohen (1990) stated that the multi-grade classroom tends to down-play competition between students and overly academic instruction, which promote better attitudes and peer relations. Mycock (1967) contended that students in multi-age classrooms have a greater sense of belonging, support, security, and confidence than students in single-age

classrooms (cited in Ford, 1977). Ford (1977) asserted that students in multi-age classes have more positive self-concept and self-esteem, lengthened teacher-student relationships, like school better, and have better attitudes toward work. Leight and Rinehart (1992) claimed that there is more of a family feeling and cooperative atmosphere in a multi-grade classroom than in a single-grade classroom. It is difficult for large schools to provide such a close atmosphere. Craig and McClellan (1988) stated that when organized for pedagogical reasons, which are clearly understood, the multi-grade classroom can be a blessing in disguise.

There are also those who point out that the multi-grade classroom has weaknesses. The three major weaknesses of the multi-grade classroom which have been identified are: it is more demanding of teachers than single-grade classrooms; curriculum has not been developed, nor teachers trained for multi-grade classrooms; and bureaucratic problems associated with small schools. Buchinger (1988) stated that where the multi-grade situation means higher numbers of students in the classroom the teacher has less time to spend with individuals.

Veenman et al. (1987) reported that teaching in a mixed-age class is very demanding, and teachers in such classes report less satisfaction with their job. Miller (1991) echoed their finding, stating that a multi-grade classroom demands more time of the teacher and is more complex than

teaching in a single-grade classroom. It should be noted that a heavier workload can contribute to the negative feelings toward multi-grade classrooms noted earlier. Small schools with multi-grade classrooms generally do not allow teachers the luxury of preparation time during the school day. The teacher is often with his/her students every minute of the school day. This places a heavy burden on the teacher, especially since planning and preparation must always be done outside of the regular working day.

A major problem with the multi-grade classroom is the lack of recognition of its existence. It seems that curriculum planning and teacher training go on with no recognition of the existence of this type of classroom organization. Cohen (1990) stated that there is a lack of curriculum materials, and teachers are not prepared to teach in multi-grade classes, since they have been trained for single-grade classes. In many multi-grade classrooms teachers try to teach the regular single-graded curriculum, which they have been trained to deliver. Craig and McClellan (1987) contended that it is a practically impossible task for a teacher to meet the expectations of two curricula at the same time. They also stated that the present curriculum is difficult to combine in many cases. They suggested that even where schools attempt to rotate curricula serious problems arise from the changing nature of the classroom situations from year to year. Chace (1961) stated that success is



curtailed when regular graded activities are practiced in the multi-grade classroom. He said that as long as single-grade standards and patterns of operation are followed multi-grade classes will have problems. He also stated that limitations imposed by grade barriers must be lifted if multi-grade schools are to be successful.

#### *Other indicators of achievement*

Factors such as drop-out rate, participation in extra-curricular activities, and participation in post-secondary education are also indicators of student achievement. Graduation from high school, experiencing a broad range of experience through extra-curricular activities, and acceptance in a post-secondary educational institution can be considered to be achievements in themselves. Such achievements are also of interest because they reflect an attitude toward education. Staying in school, taking an active role in the life of the school, and desire to continue with further education after high school demonstrate a healthy attitude toward education. Such attitudes are developed from students' experiences in school. If it is accepted that students begin to develop their attitudes toward education when they begin school those three factors can give us an indication of the quality of their experiences in school, and a measure of the differences in quality of different school organizations.

### **Drop-out rates**

Leaving Early (1984), a study of the drop-out phenomenon in Newfoundland and Labrador, stated that a drop-out is anyone who leaves school before graduating, for any reason other than death. This is the most commonly accepted definition of a drop-out, and is the definition used in the context of this study. That study followed the group of students who entered school in 1963 to their graduation from high school. They found that thirty-three percent of that cohort dropped out of school early, and only fifty percent actually graduated from grade twelve. They also found that the highest percentage of drop-outs from school were found in predominantly rural areas of the province. This could be a reflection of the quality of the educational experience being provided in rural areas of the province, or of other factors.

Leaving Early (1984) identified a number of factors which contribute to students' decisions to leave school before graduating. Those factors were: failure to achieve in regular school work; grade level placement two or more years below average; irregular attendance; dislike of teachers and principals; low scholastic and reading ability; unhappy, non-supportive family situations; performance consistently below potential; non-participation in extra-curricular activities; serious physical or emotional handicap; disciplinary problems; pregnancy; and delinquency. They identified academic failure as the most frequently named reason for

making such a decision. Other significant reasons for leaving school early were found to be to go to work, to look for work, and hatred of school. When categorized, school related reasons were the most commonly identified as the reason for dropping out of school.

Kitchen (1968), in a study of educational output of the Atlantic provinces, contended that the educational problems of this region are rooted in the culture and family structure which is found here. He insisted that high levels of parental illiteracy, large families, residence in small communities, and high levels of unemployment are the major contributors to low levels of educational output in this region. He argued that the high drop-out rate in this region is related to the economic and social conditions rather than to school related problems.

LeCompte and Dworkin (1991) placed the major blame for high drop-out rates at the feet of the school system. They stated that poor administrative practices, reflecting a lack of caring for the welfare of the students, contributes greatly to the drop-out rate. They contended that the school structure and common institutional practices lead to boredom and low achievement in some students. An example of this is ability grouping for instruction, which channels some students into a slow advancement group which tends to progress slower than others. This sets up a self-fulfilling prophesy leading to the students being labelled as slow

achievers, increases the variance between students, and discourages those in the slowed group from continuing. They also identified retention of students in a grade level, due to academic failure, as harmful to a child's self-esteem and personal adjustment, therefore leading to increased risk of dropping out. They further suggested that students are not often given good advice on courses which they should take and coping strategies to deal with tests, deadlines, and other hurdles.

The role of student intellectual and personality traits have been the most commonly studied in terms of drop-out rates (Rumberger, 1983; & Sewell, Palmo, & Manni, 1981). Rumberger (1983) stated that family background is a major factor in students' decisions to drop out of school. Such factors as low socio-economic status, early pregnancy, and early marriage are frequently stated reasons for dropping out of school. Sewell, Palmo, and Manni (1981) found that drop-outs performed more poorly on standardized tests and had lower intelligence quotients than students who graduated from high school. In light of that finding they reported that the intelligence quotients of students who had dropped out of school were still within the normal range, indicating that it should not have been a major factor in their decisions to drop out of school. They suggested that the institutional situation could be the problem, and, notably, its possible

contribution to poor academic performance through causing low self-esteem in students.

Cervantes (1965) focused some attention on alienation of some students within the school as a contributor to drop-out rates. He pointed out that students who are placed behind their age-mates often have less verbal and social skills, and do not take part in school activities, therefore they do not feel a sense of belonging. He reported that two thirds of the drop-outs he studied stated that they were never really friends with any teachers and they viewed teachers as unfriendly. He found that drop-outs used their home and families as more influential sources of advice and inspiration than teachers. He went on to state that the high school drop-out problem is not basically a high school problem, it begins much earlier in a child's life. He suggested that a non-graded classroom, which fosters a more personal student-teacher relationship, could be a significant factor in reducing the drop-out rate. He also suggested that more participation in extra-curricular activities could be a factor in helping students feel a sense of belonging, thus encouraging them to stay in school.

#### **Participation in extra-curricular activities**

Cervantes (1965) stated that:

Participation in school activities gives the youth a role, a conversation piece, an identification, a

comradeship, a support for his academic orientation, a feeling of kinship with the administration and their goals, a sense of accomplishment, a chance for self-development and recognition. Insofar as a youth becomes a participant rather than a detached observer he becomes emotionally committed and feels he "belongs." That is just the feeling that the drop-out does not have. (p. 103)

This author has ascribed enormous importance to participation in extra-curricular activities as a means of developing positive feelings toward school in students. If it has such strong possibilities to develop self-esteem in students, and encourage them to continue their education, it must be a powerful contributor to student achievement. Studies have made a close link between positive self-concept and academic achievement (Beck, 1984; & Purkey, 1970; cited in Garzarelli, Everhart, & Lester, 1993; Howley & Huang, 1993; Marsh, 1992; Camp, 1990; & Griffin, 1988). Simeroth (1987) stated that participation in extra-curricular activities was significantly related to self-concept in adolescent girls.

Marsh (1992) stated that participation in extra-curricular activities has a strong potential to increase students' commitment to school. He also found that the effect is generalized across school sizes and it might be stronger in small schools since they have a higher participation rate. Griffin (1988) insisted that extra-

curricular activities fill the need for belonging and provide motivation and recognition for students who do not find it in the classroom. Howley and Huang (1993) suggested that small schools may present better opportunities to implement effective practices, which could account for high participation rates in small schools.

McNamara, Haensly, Lupkowski, and Edlind (1985) summed up the benefits of participation in extra-curricular activities as: it provides an opportunity to develop maturity and independence; it fills the need for belonging; it allows all students to experience success; it provides a balance in students' lives; and it helps students to become higher achievers. Humphries (1989) found that students who were identified as potential drop-outs displayed more negative self-concept and expressed more negative feelings concerning experiences at home, at school, and with peers. With that being the case participation in extra-curricular activities, with its close link to self-concept, is an important contributor to student achievement.

### **Participation in post-secondary education**

Little has been written on participation in post-secondary education as an indicator of student achievement in high school. Horn (1991) used the percentage of students intending to pursue post-secondary education as an indicator of school achievement, and Anderson and Bedenbough (1991)

used scholarships to colleges and universities as criteria for awarding academic achievement awards. It seems that this is a legitimate indicator of student school achievement, since it does demonstrate a positive attitude toward post-secondary education. If students' experiences were negative as a result of the type of school organization they attended they would not have a very positive attitude toward continuing education.

### *Summary*

It seems that small schools and multi-grade classrooms are here to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador. With declining enrolments, and the difficulties presented by the geography of the province, we must be prepared to accept this as a reality of education in this province. The challenge is to make this organizational strategy as efficient as possible. To do that we must begin to recognize the existence of multi-grade classes and develop curriculum materials and strategies which lend themselves to use in such classes. For too long we have pretended that this type of classroom does not exist and acted as if it was an inferior, and outdated, educational organization, which should be eradicated from our province.

Many studies have been done on multi-grade classrooms, and the results are inconclusive. Some indicate that students in multi-grade classes achieve better than those in



single-grade classes, others suggest that students in single-grade classes achieve better than those in multi-grade classes, and many studies have found that there is no significant difference in student achievement between the two organizational styles. Several studies have shown that in areas of affective development students in multi-grade classrooms outperform students in single-grade classrooms.

It is important to use a broad definition of achievement when studying the differences in multi-grade and single-grade classrooms, since there are many sides to achievement. The predominant tendency to compare achievement as performance on standardized tests of academic skills has been challenged, and it has been shown that there are many other important factors to consider in student achievement. A major area for consideration is how well the school organization promotes a positive self-concept in students. Self-concept has been linked to student attitudes toward education, achievement, and students' aspirations for the future. Self-concept may be the basis of student achievement and the educational organization which best promotes it may be the best for fostering student achievement.

The small school has weaknesses, but it also has many strengths. It has been shown that students participate more in extra-curriculars, and have more feelings of loyalty and belonging in small schools. Such feelings of belonging and participation should foster feelings of security and support

achievement. If the small school does foster firmer psychological development in students it could be as good as, or even superior to, other organizational styles in promoting student achievement. Education of children is such a complex endeavour that there probably can not be a best organization for all situations. It is imperative that educators be willing to employ the organizational style that best serves the needs of the students in the educational setting in which they find themselves, and realize that the quality of the human contact is possibly the strongest influence on student achievement, rather than any organizational style. The students' views on such matters will be presented in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4 - Presentation of data

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the perceptions of participants on the transition from a small school to a large school. An effort was made to present this data as much in the participants' words as was possible. Interjections and explanations by the interviewer were made in an effort to make the presentation easier to follow for the reader. Readers should note that the participants use the term "here" to refer to the small school and "there" to refer to the large school. The participants also use the term "dinner" to refer to the mid-day meal, commonly called lunch.

It must be noted that the participants in this study were high school students who were reporting from the viewpoint of their particular biases. Occasionally one contradicted himself/herself or made a statement which seems extreme. It is the purpose of this study to report on the perceptions of those students, not to validate them. Whether the students' perceptions were grounded in reality or in their imaginations is not the concern of this study. It should be noted that the students' perceptions represent reality for them, and therefore provide valuable insights into the nature of the transition from a small school to a large school.

It must be understood that this is a study of one small group of students, in one situation. The experiences of this group of students may be quite different from the experiences of other groups in similar situations. All names are fictitious for the protection of the participants.

### **Owen**

Owen is a very quiet, bright eighteen year old. He was a honours student in the small school which he attended from kindergarten to grade nine. He has some very strong feelings about the small school atmosphere in which he spent his early years. He believed that he was a good student in that school who, kept up on his work and, "never got into much trouble." One reason for this was the close monitoring of his work by the teachers. He stated, "If I did not have my homework done in one class the teacher would come looking for it in the next class, because it was still the same teacher."

Owen talked of the feelings of closeness to be found in a small school, and the sense of ownership which can develop in students as they become involved in the school's activities. One of his fondest memories is of being able to see the fruits of the labour carried out by him and his classmates as young children attempting to improve the environment around their school by planting trees. He planted a tree in a particularly memorable and protected location and even now, years later, continues to visit and

nurture it. He has a strong feeling of this being a contribution which he made and can continue to see. Such memories bind him to a school which nurtured a sense of caring in him and provided him with feelings of worth and belonging. He said there are no such tangible indicators of his belonging and roots in the larger high school where he has spent his last three years. He cannot look out the window during the day and feel good that he has enhanced the surroundings of the school, nor does he have a reason to visit the school once the school day is over. He plans to attend university to study pharmacy after graduating from high school.

#### **Perceptions of the small school experience**

When asked to remember his years in the small school Owen very readily reminisced about feelings of familiarity with the building, students, staff, and teachers. He stated that it was easy to get involved in activities since there was no sense of shyness, due to the fact that everyone was so familiar. He contrasted this with life in the larger school:

All the teachers recognized you for who you were and the things you had done, while in the large school only some of the teachers got to know you. . . . In the small school you had grown up with everyone in your class so you did not mind getting involved in things. . . . Everybody in the small school were friends. . . . There was just one large group in the small school who were all friends. . . .

He felt that in the small school teachers were very approachable and students felt comfortable with asking them to do extra things with them, while in the large school students were not familiar enough with teachers to do that. He stated:

You could ask a teacher to do anything for you here, and most of the time, if it was a sensible thing, they would try, but out there you do not feel that you could ask a teacher to do that unless they brought it up first.

He articulated a belief that there was a strong sense of ownership in the small school and that everyone was very close and worked together toward a common end.

Owen offered several observations about how classes, courses, and teaching differed between the small and large school. He felt that what was lost in quantity in the small school was made up for in quality. He stated that:

There was less variety to learn but what you did learn you learned well. Where the classes were small the teacher could stay with students who did not know something until they did.

He pointed out that it was very difficult to hide indiscretions, and get away with not completing work in the small school, since he was with the same teacher practically all the time. He said, "If a teacher got angry with you there was no way to avoid them because you had the same teacher all day".

Owen felt that the small school excelled in provision of more hands-on work and readily available help, in contrast to

a more study [book] oriented approach in the large school.

He said:

Knowing all the teachers, any time you could get help and here we did a lot of hands on things, like when we learned about the environment we went out and really saw it. Out there it is a lot more book study.

He also stated that the strong point of the small school was its close relationships, and friendly competition was a help to attaining better grades. He stated:

Here I could have gotten a real push because Trudy [a classmate] and I had a competition trying to beat each other in marks, but out there with so many people you did not have one person to compete with. Trudy and I took different courses and so on, so I did not have that competition any more, so I kind of slacked off a bit. . . . I am trying to choose people to try to beat this year.

Owen had been in multi-graded classrooms for most of his ten years in the small school. He felt that the multi-grade situation was not a problem for him, since that is the classroom organization which he was used to, and he knew no other way. He stated:

I did not find the multi-grade class too bad. I could understand most of it and even when what we were learning was a grade above my level there was not a big difference in what we would have learned anyway. Most of the courses that were combined were those which I found easy to understand. For some people it might have been hard. . . . From the time we started we were always together the same way, so we never really noticed what grade level book we were using. . . . It was all right for me, I found it all right.

One problem he noted was that students could miss a set of skills if they were asked to do a program one year in advance

of their grade level before doing the program for that grade level. He stated:

For the first year that programs were combined one grade might miss the program which they were supposed to do, so they might be missing some skills and find the program more difficult. The higher grade, which had already done that program, would already have the skills, so they would not find it difficult.

But, as far as he could recall it had not posed any problems for him or his classmates.

Owen felt that the small school had prepared him well for high school and that the teachers had made sure that the basic skills were set at a young age. He said:

I was well prepared because the basics were really set here and the teachers made sure you knew what you were doing. I have noticed that with some of the students from the large school what they get wrong is wrong because they get the basic part of it wrong first, then they cannot continue on. I found here that the basics are set. . . .

He said that what he missed most was the sense that he could ask a teacher for anything in the small school, but he did not feel the same way in the larger school. He said:

In a small school you get to know everybody really well, even the teachers. It seems like the teachers had more time for each student. . . .

#### **Anticipation of the large school experience**

Students in their last year of attendance in the small school usually eagerly anticipated the opportunity to attend a much larger school which was outside of their community, and Owen was no exception. He said that in his last year



attending the small school he really looked forward to moving to the high school, where he expected to have much more freedom and find a wider variety of activities. He said:

I expected a lot more people, with a lot more variety of things happening. I expected to get away with many things because the teachers would not have enough time to notice me.

He had heard many stories about the high school from older students, but they mainly focused on enjoyable events, jokes, and anecdotes about teachers. He said:

In grade nine you really look forward to it and when your friends from a year ahead of you are gone, of course you want to go too. . . . They told you all the good things, they did not tell you the bad things. . . . They told stories about all the trouble students got into during lunch hours. There was nothing really dangerous or anything just pranks like setting off stink bombs, and things that were funny. They told about some of the funny habits of the teachers. . . . A lot of people said there were a lot more courses you could choose from. . . . You could be in a course which you find really hard but then right after that you are in a class you really enjoy so that sort of takes the pressure off.

From serious talks which he had with older students Owen felt confident in his ability to cope with the demands which would be placed on him in the high school, but he was concerned about what the people from the larger school would think of him. He stated that:

At first I felt that it would be no problem but the closer I got to going the more I worried about how I would do. My brother told me he did not find much difference with regard to his marks so that put my worries at rest...I was nervous about all the other people out there and what they would think of me.

The students from his community had a reputation for being rough and he had some fear of being seen as that type. He said that:

First when the people from the small school go to the large school each year they are seen as a trouble making crowd, but that is just to get us going and after a while you realize that. . . . I had a fear that I would be seen as a trouble maker because I was from the small school.

He also had some fear that students from his community might be discriminated against in the high school. He stated:

We were told that a couple of the teachers really did not like students from the small school and did not agree with us going there, so they would mark harder for us. After being there I found that to be nothing but something to get people going.

#### **Impressions of the large school**

Owen's first impressions of the large school were of its size, crowdedness, and a feeling of alienation. He stated:

It was a big place and it was crowded. It seemed at first that it would be hard to find your way around, it seemed so big, and everyone looked at you sort of strange as if they are saying who is this new person here. . . . First when we went there we felt that everyone was eying us, but that was only nerves. . . . boo

People often assume that the number of courses offered in a school is an indicator of the quality of education it offers its students, but Owen noted that even though there were many more courses offered in the high school they were of no higher quality than those offered in the small school. The high school offered more resources but the materials did not

seem to be as well cared for as those in the small school.

He stated that:

They had a lot more money where there were a lot more students there so they were supposed to have a lot better facilities. . . . There were more subjects and some were courses on things you would use in life, like woodworking and foods, but normal courses like biology and math were pretty much the same as in the small school...there was no difference in the quality of the classes. . . . The gym is bigger but the things they have do not seem as good a quality as what is in the small school. . . . They have to provide for more people.

The laboratory facilities in the large school were more focused on the sciences and more accessible, as compared to the multi-purpose room used for a laboratory/art room in the small school. He said:

In the small school science is all one subject but out there we have biology, physics, and chemistry, and the labs are all separate so that they do not have to share and each lab has its own equipment dealing with exactly what they are doing, like biology has dissecting equipment, which is all in one place and does not need to be moved to do chemistry.

Owen pointed out that there were some adjustments to be made on entering the large school. One such adjustment was to the teaching and learning style found in the high school. Classes did not seem as focused as those in the small school had. He stated:

I figured they would not want discussion where there were large classes, but a lot of them would do a lot more talking rather than going straight from the book. . . . In the small school we used to talk but it was usually on the book [focused on topic], but out there they say a topic but then it goes off unto different topics and you continue talking about that.

Teachers did not monitor students' work as closely as they had in the small school and students had to remember when things had to be completed and passed in for themselves. This made him feel that the teachers did not care if he did his work. He said:

A lot of the teachers set an assignment and let you go, they did not really keep at you saying remember you have to have this in at a certain date. In the small school the teacher reminded you when you had to have it in, but out there they set it and if you did it, good enough, but if you did not you got no marks for it, they would not get on your back for it. . . . I was used to not having to remember a lot of things because the teachers would be right there telling me how to do it and when I had to have it done.

He stated that his grades dropped in his first year in high school, but then came back to the level which he had regularly attained in the small school. He stated that:

At first my marks dropped a bit but then I got used to it and my marks stayed about the same as they were here. A couple of them dropped but that was because I kind of slacked off. . . . If I had it back I would have had the same marks because I know I could have.

He felt that he had done as well as he had expected in most courses, better in some, but worse in math, which he attributed to lack of effort on his part. He said:

In some courses I did what I expected and in others I did better than I thought, but I really dropped in math, which I thought I should be able to handle. . . . It was lack of effort on my part at the beginning of the year. . . . I have nothing to blame about the schools or anything.

It is often believed that students who come from small, poorly equipped schools cannot possibly be as well prepared

for high school as those who come from large, well equipped schools (Beckner and O'Neal, 1980), but Owen felt that, within the context of the class, he entered the high school on an equal academic footing with the students from the larger system, and he may have been ahead of them in language. He said:

First when you go there you figure there is going to be a lot of people smarter than you and better at things than you, but I found that I was just as good as anybody there. We knew a lot more about the language course than they did. In grade eight or nine here we went over verbs and adverbs and things but out there a lot of them in grade twelve language were asking the teacher to go over all of that. We spent the first month of school going over that and most of us from the small school knew it pretty well already. In most other courses we were on pretty much the same level.

He stated that the students from the larger school may have been more prepared for high school only in that they were more familiar with the school and the teachers. They had been doing courses from some of those teachers during their junior high years. He stated:

The only thing that they knew better than us was that they knew what the teachers wanted answers to be, they already knew the style of the teacher. In many cases they had had the teachers before. . . . They knew more of the people who were in the classes so they did not have any trouble talking to people . . . and they knew a lot of the teachers. . . not better prepared academically.

It could be expected that within a school made up of students from eight different communities there would be some sense of a social order. It is quite conceivable that some discrimination could emerge, but Owen pointed out that he saw

no discernable discrimination against any students within the school. He said:

People from the different communities are not really separated and it is not noticed . . . I do not think about where I am from and where others are from when I am out there. . . . Some of the teachers if they had trouble with one student from our community they would watch us first, but once you did a test and did all right that, was it.

### **Socialization**

Owen contended that the major adjustment which had to be made in moving to the larger school was in socialization rather than academics. He stated that the first few months were very difficult socially but after that there was no problem. He said that at first the group from the small school stuck together and did not mix with those from the large school, but the barriers quickly broke down and they were assimilated into the school life in a few months. He stated:

The first couple of months or so you do not know who to talk to, but as one person in our group would get to know someone they would introduce them and slowly we would get to know them and they would bring in another person, and so on. . . . Most people get along out there now very well.

Acceptance by the students from the large system was quicker than he had expected. He stated that after that initial difficult period there did not seem to be any social barriers between the students from the different towns. He said that:

A lot of people accept you right away. If you talked to them, that was it, they did not care anymore. . . . A lot still stick together at recess

time and dinner time in the small school corridor [a particular place in the large school], but that is just because it is mostly us there dinner times, but when the buses come we go with whoever is around. When we first went there we stuck together.

Owen stated that an effort was made by the school to make new students feel welcomed and comfortable, but the new students needed to be prepared to approach others and speak first. He pointed out that he had a feeling of being looked down on at first, but that was just imaginary. He said:

First you felt that everyone was against you, but the first time you were in a class the teacher would come down and talk to you for a little while. . . . it seems like they tried to get to know you right away. . . they did not want you off to the side not getting involved. A lot of the students needed to be spoken to first but once you did it was all right after.

He stated that he did get more involved in social activities in his second and third years of high school.

#### **Extra-curriculars and busing**

A major contributor to the atmosphere of a school is the extra-curricular programs which are offered to the students, and their accessibility. Owen stated that the large school did not offer as many after school activities as the small school did and it was difficult to get involved in those which were offered due to transportation problems, and the numbers trying out. He stated:

It seems that there are not as many activities offered out there. It is difficult to get on school teams because there are so many people trying out. . . . Many things are after school or

late at night, so people from our community cannot get involved due to busing problems. . . . But, dinner times the gym is always open to you and the computer room so that you could use any of that if you wanted to. . . . You really notice the things you cannot do because the bus is not going out or you have no other way there . . . and a lot of times you are not let know very long before so you do not have time to set up another way to get home.

Owen stated that travelling on the school bus was very difficult. It made for a long day and the trip itself had a draining effect on his energy. He stated that:

To go to the large school I have to get up two hours earlier than I had to come here, which means I have to watch how late I stay up a lot more, and I am really dropping when I get to school. The bus really drains your energy a lot. You are just sitting there for a half hour. . . . When you are getting out of school you know in your mind that you have a half hour to a hour before you get home. We have no time after school to do something before supper, so we are losing a lot of our time away from school. . . . Getting rides costs you money.

The noise level on the bus was the major factor in this energy drain. He found it very difficult to deal with.

### **Final reflections**

In retrospect, Owen felt that his grades suffered in his first year of high school, but rebounded to where he felt they should be in the subsequent years, and that overall he had been successful in his studies. He stated, "I slacked off a bit at first but now I am doing what I expect I can do. . . . The marks I am getting now are what I feel I should be getting". He felt that the small school had given him a



solid base of knowledge and skills for high school. He stated:

I think I did a lot better in my first couple of language courses because what we did here really set you up for what you had to do out there. In the sciences I found that I knew what was going on as soon as they started to talk about it. . . . A lot of the material we covered there we had already covered here, even in the second level biology course we had done a lot of the material here. I thought this was an excellent school. . . . When you were here you said you couldn't wait to get out of here but looking back on it I think it was good here.

Owen expressed a belief that he would have attained better academic grades if he could have done high school in the small school setting, but that the larger school provided him with better preparation for post-secondary education in that it provided a wider variety of experiences. He stated:

Academically I could have done a lot more in the small school, but all around I think going to the large school is better, I got more used to dealing with people. . . . In the larger school you got used to being around more people. . . . I think I would have done just as well in the small school, or maybe a bit better because I would not have had to get used to new things, it would be just continuing on so I think I would have done a bit better, but I do not think I would have been as well prepared for university.

A lot more courses are offered and you get to choose exactly what you want to do, whereas in a small school you have to do whatever is offered and it could be something you have no interest in.

Owen would advise students who are about to enter the high school, from the small school in his home town, to work

hard from the outset to establish a good impression, and to make an effort to fit in by speaking to people. He said:

When you go out there do not sit back at first without going up and talking to people, because the longer you wait the worse they will think of you, but even if you go up to someone and ask where something is at least you have started talking to them. That is what I did the first time I was out there and the next time I saw them they talked to me . . . then it was all right. In class always try your best at the beginning so that the teacher will see that you are not a trouble maker and they will accept you right away.

Owen contended that if he had been given a choice in his last year of attendance in the small school he would have chosen to do high school in the small school as well, but after having attended the larger school he can see its value and is pleased that he went there. He saw the experience as a small step toward adjusting to leaving home and going to an even larger centre. He stated:

If I had been given the choice in grade nine I would most likely have stayed, but after being there I would rather to have been there for the last three years, because next year I am going to have to go to an even bigger place, and if I had stayed here and had to go from a small school to university it would have been a really big shock. Now that I have adjusted to a bigger crowd once it will probably be easier the next time. . . . I think it was a lot better that I went out there.

In spite of all the adjustment problems and transportation difficulties he stated that he had never entertained thoughts of leaving school before graduating. He said, "I have really enjoyed school, it was good times".

### **Trudy**

Trudy is eighteen years old, very quiet, and was a honours student in the small school which she attended from kindergarten to grade nine. She has always been outgoing and well liked by her classmates and teachers. She is very dependable and a hard worker. She was elected to the graduation committee this year, and has been highly involved in making preparations for the 1994 graduation celebration. Trudy hopes to study medicine after graduation from high school.

#### **Perceptions of the small school experience**

When asked of her memories of life in the small school Trudy recalled small classes with close personal relationships between students, and with teachers. She contrasted that with the large classes in the large school which she now attends. She stated that she remembered:

The small classes, compared to the large school and the help from the teachers. You had a really close relationship with the teachers and if you needed any help they were right there for you. In the large school they didn't have as much time but they tried their best anyway.

She judged herself to have been an average student in the small school, who worked hard to keep up on her homework and studies, and has maintained that in high school. She stated, "I got eighties and nineties and a scattered seventy. I

never failed very often. . . . I was pretty good with my homework. In the large school I keep up on my homework too".

During the majority of her years in the small school Trudy had been in multi-grade classrooms. She found that the multi-grade situation gave her time to do a lot of work in class while the teacher was spending time with the other grade, and that she could actually work ahead of the general level of the class. She stated:

Where there were multi-grade classrooms and only a few people in each grade the teacher would set work for you to do and you would go on and do it while he was working with the other grade, so you had time in class to do whatever you wanted and the teacher's help was there.

When asked if integration of programs from the two grade levels in multi-grade classes presented any problems for her, she replied, "I do not know if it was a real problem but the younger grade would have to do the other grade's work so it was a bit hard, but the teachers were there for you." She felt that it was a challenge, but with the teacher's help it presented no serious problem for her.

### **Anticipation of the large school experience**

After attending the same school for ten years the promise of a move to a new, and larger, school was exciting for students. While in grade nine, Trudy looked forward to attending the large high school. She felt that the variety of teachers would be very good, in that it would tend to

break up the day and make it less boring, in contrast to having the same teacher all day. She said:

I think everyone looks forward to going to the large school . . . all the new friends and everything, it is a big change. . . . One thing that I looked forward to was having a different teacher for every subject. Here we had one or two teachers for all subjects and I found that it was getting a little boring having one teacher the whole day, but out there you have a teacher for almost every subject you have, and it makes it more interesting.

She had some concerns about the move, because she had heard that students got very little help from teachers in the large school, although she reflected that she did not find that to be the case when she got there. She stated:

Some people said that some of the teachers do not really help you out, they just give you the work and if you do not understand it, too bad. . . teachers I have had out there I did not find that way, I found them pretty good.

She was also concerned that she would not fit in socially.

She said that she had heard stories that:

The girls in the large school did not like the girls from the small school. . . . You would be despised as soon as you get out there. . . because the boys from there have someone new to look at.

She stated that when she got there her fears were put to rest because some people she had previously known in the large community helped her make the adjustment. She stated:

I kind of thought that I would not fit in where I did not know anyone, but there were a couple of people who I knew, who used to come to our community, so I hung around with them when I got there, and they introduced me on down the line.

Trudy had some fears of not being able to perform satisfactorily, academically, and she was apprehensive about her readiness for high school, since she was not sure that she was prepared to make wise choices about courses she was not familiar with. She was also concerned about the difficulty of such courses. She stated:

I did not feel that I was ready for high school. . . . People said it was a big step up from general courses to courses like biology and chemistry and you had a choice in math. . . . All those changes with the courses were the main thing, all the general courses we did here were broken down into separate courses and we had a choice, and I was not sure that I was making the right choices. . . . I knew it would be harder but I was determined to try to make it a little bit easier by studying more.

#### **Impressions of the large school**

When asked about her first impression of the large school Trudy said that the number of people moving around the building was impressive, and it renewed her fear of having socialization problems. She said it was:

A big change, a very very big change. When I walked in that classroom and saw all those people . . . this little school does not have very many people and out there everyone lined up in the halls, so I thought it was going to be really hard with all those people.

Trudy stated that the biggest adjustment that she had to make was in getting used to new teachers and teaching styles. She had to quickly learn to organize her work better, since she did not have as much help from the teacher. She found that she was on her own more in the high school and was not

reminded as often of work to be done, but she found a daily planner to be a great help in that regard. She said:

We were used to certain teachers teaching a certain way and when we went out there it seemed like they were skipping over everything and not paying enough attention to the one topic. As soon as you get to know one topic they were going on to something else, here they stayed with it until everyone understood. They helped you after you found that it was hard. . . . I had to organize my work a bit better . . . to keep everything I had to do in line, because where you have mid-terms and finals you had to have everything there. . . . It was difficult to get used to all those new courses. . . . Some teachers kept reminding you but others told you when things were due and you had to remember, and if you did not that was it. One good thing out there was that they sold planners and when you had something to do you could write it in your planner.

She contended that there was a big step from general to more specific and focused courses, especially in the sciences, and more work was required to perform well. She felt that the atmosphere was stricter and more formal in the large school. She stated that, "The principal and vice-principal were a little stricter out there . . . on behaviour". She expected her grades to drop in her first year in high school but they dropped more than she had anticipated, especially in mathematics. She attributed this to the difficulties of adjusting to a new learning situation and teachers. She said:

My marks dropped a little bit but I think it was because I was not used to studying as much as I had to out there. Where people had told me before that my marks would drop when I went out there, I was expecting my marks to drop a little, but in math I was used to getting nineties and out there I was getting seventies, so that was a big drop for me. .

. . Where I was doing advanced math I found that hard.

Trudy stated that the small school had prepared her well for high school and that she could fit into the routine of the large school fairly well. She was very pleased to have been able to choose courses that she was interested in rather than having to do the only few courses that were offered. She felt that she was as well prepared for high school as those students in her classes who were from the large elementary school. She stated that the students from the large system may have been more comfortable socially but academically there was no difference. She stated:

There are always some people who you feel are ahead of you . . . but generally they were not ahead of me. . . . They all knew each other anyway . . . but for the subjects I do not think they were any more prepared because they had done the same things that we had done, so that way we were about the same.

Although Trudy did not find it too difficult to make the adjustment to the large school there were some aspects of her small school experience which she missed. She stated:

I missed the teachers coming down to my desk and asking if I had any problems. Even before I asked they would be there to ask me if I needed any help. Out there you had to ask in order to get them to come down, so I feel that the teachers here were out more to help you than out there.

She reflected that she has really enjoyed attending the large school. Neither academic performance nor socialization turned out to be much of a problem for her.



### Socialization

One fear for people going to a new environment is that they may not be welcomed, but Trudy stated that the teachers and administrators in the large school made the students transferring into their school feel very welcomed. She said:

The teachers I found really nice, they did not treat you any differently than the large school people, but the principal and vice-principal really made you feel welcomed. They had this big meeting with everyone and they were glad to see us there. On our orientation day [in the spring of their grade nine year] . . . the teachers made us feel really welcomed, because they wanted us to come out to their school.

She perceived no discrimination of any kind from the teachers. She felt that:

I am the type of person who gets along with everyone and when I went out there, once I got to know everyone, I got along with all the teachers and all the students too, so I did not think that I was discriminated against.

Since Trudy knew some students in the large school previously, it did not take long for her to fit into the social fabric of the school. She stated, "It did not take very long to fit in because I knew two or three girls and they knew everyone else, so if you were in with them everyone else accepted you into their group". She stated that she now has many friends in the large school and there are no social barriers between students from different communities. She perceived some jealousy on the part of the girls in the large school toward the new entries in their school, and observed that the first year in the large school is very difficult.

She went on to say that it does not take too long for students to mingle and for their attitudes toward each other to improve. She stated that:

After grade ten everyone is used to the small school people and feel there is nothing wrong with them, but first when we went out there they did not like the small school people, but the grade ten girls, I heard them today saying that the small school girls are nothing but trouble. . . . I think their attitudes will change because I know it did for us. . . . I do not find it is any trouble now. . . everyone is mingled together. In grade twelve the small school people are with the large school people, but still there are times when the small school people are all together, like dinner time. . they have their own hallway.

#### **Extra-curriculars and busing**

Trudy did not join any extra-curricular activities in her first year, out of fear of taking away from her academic performance, but later became involved in cheerleading, peer tutoring, and graduation committee. She noted that being bused to school has created some problems in respect to involvement in graduation committee activities. She said:

. . . I have been in cheerleading, peer tutoring, and the graduation committee. I find that for graduation committee meetings I have to stay in the larger community all night, so I find that hard, especially when I have a test on the next morning.  
. . .

Trudy felt that even though the bus ride created a long day, and made extra-curricular participation difficult, it was not a serious problem for her. If anything, it provided her with a time to catch up on study. She pointed out that

there were days when she thought the road conditions were dangerous. She stated:

The early mornings bug me but you have that extra half hour to study, for some people who put it off and put it off. That extra half hour can help you. Everyone in the same class can study together can ask questions back and forth. . . . I find it all right because it is not that far anyway. It does not bother me, except I do not like stormy days.

### Final reflections

Trudy observed that there was no difference between students entering the high school from the large and the small school systems. She pointed out that while she had no problems fitting in socially it was difficult to break into some cliques found in the large school. She stated:

. . . There are a certain few who think they are better. There are certain groups who do not want you to be in with them, and if there is one person in that group who becomes friends with you [the group thinks] there is something wrong with them. . . . That is something that really bugged me about out there.

Trudy felt that she was as well prepared for high school in the small school as she would have been had she attended a large elementary school system. Early training in doing research papers and oral communication, which were stressed in the small school, were a big help to her in her academic performance in high school. She also felt that early training in the small school really helped her to organize for work in the high school. While attending the large school she missed the level of individual help which she received in the small school. She stated:

In grade eleven the language course is three or four research papers and I found it so easy because our research papers here had to be so detailed, and when I got in grade eleven I knew exactly how to do it. I am a little bit shy and the oral communications was good because in the language course they split us into two groups for oral communication and it was something like what we did here so I was used to that. . . . The only real problem I still have is with math, I am still doing advanced math, but everything else I am doing really well in. . . .

She stated that her grades did continue to improve as the high school years went by. She said:

I am getting much better marks, like I did first year biology in grade ten and I was not really used to writing down and studying all that information, but now in second year biology I know how to do it, so I am getting better marks this year than in grade ten.

Trudy felt that she could have attained better grades if she had been able to remain in the small school to complete her high school education, but she stated that she may not have done as well socially. She stated:

I know my marks were better here so my marks probably would be better if I had stayed, but socially I do not know, it would be a hard decision. . . . I think I would have probably done a little better because there would not have been that big change to a different school and different teachers, I was used to those teachers all along and the only thing that would be the problem would be the subject itself, but the teachers made it seem a little easier so I think I would have done a little better.

She felt that there was more pressure to deal with new and different people in the large school, which pushed her to learn more leadership skills. She said:

You learn leadership, I guess, because you do not know anyone so you have to get up and be willing to

speak out in front of the class. . . . I like being a part of the graduation executive because we were elected from our students to help with the graduation, and to make decisions for our graduation. It has helped me get along better with everyone else socially because I can get up now and speak my mind, and tell everyone to get on the ball.

Trudy stated that the strengths of the small school lay in the strong student-teacher and student-student relationships and a feeling of friendly competition between a small number of students for academic and social honours. She articulated the strengths of the large school as being its wide variety of course offerings and social experiences. She felt that the large school fostered independence and was probably a better preparation for university. She said:

The way they are doing things out there is helping me get prepared for university. . . . Next year I am going to university and that is a big step, so going to the large school is good in that way, it helps you get used to being away from home. . . . All together I think both of it, the step up from junior high to high school and now to university has all helped me because there was a change in the studies and the teachers and everything so when I go to university there is going to be those changes again so they are all little steps that help me . . . stepping stones. You always had the teachers to depend on here but they give you more slack out there so you have to be more independent.

Trudy would advise new students entering the high school, from the small school, to work hard since the courses in high school are more demanding than those they are used to, and they will have to work more independently. She would advise them to,

"be themselves and try to work harder academically, because it is going to be harder going out there due to the big change, so get those study habits".

Trudy always enjoyed school and had never entertained any thoughts of leaving school before graduating. She concluded by saying, "I love it out there. . . it is really nice out there and everybody is friendly".

### **Theodore**

Theodore, a young man of eighteen years old, has a tendency to keep to himself, and is generally very quiet. He is a naturally gifted athlete, but chooses to stay away from team sports due to not liking the feeling of being watched by large groups of people. He is generally the type of person who would be considered to be shy, but still seems to be rather at ease in talking to people, once the ice is broken. He is considering a career as an underwater welder after graduating from high school.

#### **Perceptions of the small school experience**

Theodore's memories of his experiences in the small school were of receiving lots of help with his work in class and spending extra time on topics which were not readily understood by students. He stated:

During classes if you had some trouble the teachers here would help you, and if you still did not understand it the teachers kept on and on and on until you did understand it, so that is a good thing here.

He said that he had pleasant memories of the small school and that it was a good school. He claimed that it was a good school because, "it was home". He said, "Here I was home, but the school where I am now I hate the long bus ride." He found the number of people, and consequent distractions, in classes in the large school to be difficult to contend with.

He had been accustomed to class sizes of fifteen to twenty students in the small school. He stated:

In the school I am in now there are around thirty five students per class and at times you cannot hear the teacher, and there is paper being tossed around and things like that, and you cannot concentrate on things. Going to school here it was so easy. . . . It made things easier because there were not very many people in a class and you could pick up on things faster. . . . I never had any hard times here . . . it is a good school.

Theodore spent many of his ten years in the small school in multi-grade classrooms, and had some observations on their effectiveness. Theodore stated that the multi-grade classroom could become confusing at times because the teacher was teaching two grades at the same time. Even though it sometimes became confusing the small number of people in class made it easier to concentrate and learn things. He felt that it was not a good arrangement, but recognized the necessity of having multi-grade classrooms in small schools and did not find it to be any particular hardship. He stated:

At times that I can remember when I was in multi-grade classrooms, when the teacher was teaching the other grade I would pay attention to their work and that would confuse me. . . . I do not think there was anything good about that arrangement. . . . I guess they had to do that here because the school is so small.

An aspect of the small school which Theodore did not like was that he felt that students were too tightly checked on, and he did not have the freedom he would have liked, to do as he wished. He said, "Sometimes the teachers were a



bit strict about going to the library and things, there had to be a teacher with you, and that seemed stupid to me". He stated a belief that he was an average student in the small school who did his work, but said that he has slacked off on homework in high school. When asked what kind of student he felt he had been in the small school, he replied, "Average I guess . . . homework was done most of the time." He continued to comment on his work habits in the large school, stating:

Since I have gone out there I have slacked off a bit because if a teacher assigns you homework they go over it the next day and you copy the notes off then, but that is for some courses, in others you can not get away with that.

#### **Anticipation of the large school experience**

After ten years in the small school the promise of a new and larger school appealed to Theodore. When he was in grade nine he really looked forward to going to high school outside of his community. He had heard stories from friends that they could do what they wanted in the high school and get away with everything. He stated, "Some people used to say that when you go out there you can do whatever you want and you can get away with doing things, it was like they were acting big." He did not find it to be that way in the high school, but he noted that there was considerably more freedom there. He said, "It seems like every school has some

restrictions but there is a big difference between here and out there."

Theodore stated that he had been pre-warned that high school courses would be more difficult than those he was used to in the small school. In spite of that he still felt confident in his ability to handle the high school courses. He found that the lack of individual help and constant reminders from teachers about work to be done were difficult in high school. He stated:

I knew that it would be hard so I had some worries. . . . I thought I was prepared but as soon as I got out there I found that the teachers taught in a different way. Out there the teachers assign the work and if you do not do it that is your own problem. When I was going to school here the teachers would help you after, even if you did not have it done, but the teachers out there say that is your tough luck.

If he had been faced with a choice when he was in grade nine he would have chosen to remain in the small school to complete his high school education, but only if the courses he needed were available. He would therefore choose to attend the large school since a wider variety of courses were available there. He stated, "I would have preferred to stay here, but I think if I had stayed here there would not have been as many courses offered as out there, so I would have chosen to go out there."

Theodore has a slight speech problem and was concerned about how that would be accepted in the large school, where students did not know him. He did not detect any acceptance

problems when he went to the high school. He said, "One thing that bothered me about going out there was my speech problem, that bugged me then but it doesn't bother me now at all . . . people out there did not seem to mind it at all".

### **Impressions of the large school**

On arrival in the high school Theodore's first impression was of its large size, and he had a distinct feeling of being out of place. He said that it was a, "big school, and where I was new there I felt out of place, like I stuck out like a sore thumb". He had to cope with a different type of timetable and the fact that he was required to move from class to class, something which he was not used to in the small school. He stated:

I had to get used to the timetable because of the fourteen day cycle they have, and going from class to class. As soon as the bell rings you have to be up and gone to get to the next class.

He noticed that teachers marked very hard on tests and he pointed out that his grades dropped by ten to fifteen percent in his first year. He had been warned of this drop, but did not expect it to be as pronounced. He stated that he:

had to adjust to the new teachers out there because some teachers are stricter than others. . . . Teachers out there mark really hard during chapter tests, that is a great difference. . . . I got an overall average between seventy and eighty, which was a drop of ten or fifteen marks. . . . this was just the adjustment I think. I expected my marks to drop a bit, because when I was going to school here the teacher told us that in high school marks usually drop about ten percent.

The major adjustment which he had to make in his first year in the large school was to get used to the teachers and their individual teaching styles. He said:

In the math course I found that the teacher here used to tell us over and over and over again, but the math teachers out there do not go over it like that and if you do not know it they will tell you to keep trying and then go and help someone else and then it is your tough luck. . . . I think I got fifty something in level one math.

Theodore articulated a belief that he had been well prepared for high school by the small school. He stated that the courses were of the same nature in both schools and much of the same material was covered. He stated:

I felt that I was well prepared for high school because the courses I did were basically the same courses I did here, like social studies and geography are the same type of course, math is the exact same thing, and in the language course we learned the exact same things that we learned here. . . . Going to school here we took notes and you had to be fast, and out there in biology there were two or three boards of notes, and we were used to it and found it easy.

He did not feel that he was at any disadvantage when compared with other students in his high school classes, in terms of academic knowledge and skills. He stated that in some courses students who came from the large school system seemed to know more and in other courses students who came from the small school seemed to know more. He attributed this to the emphasis which was placed on those courses in the respective schools, or that some courses had not been offered in the small school. He stated:

I guess we all were about average and there is always a few students who are brains, so they knew a bit more than us, there usually is that. . . . I do not think the students from the large school were better prepared than us for high school. . . . In certain courses they were ahead a little because they had taken the carpentry course and the foods course that the high school students take. [which small school students did not have access to]

### **Socialization**

Theodore said that the first year in the large school was a little difficult socially. During the first year the students from the small school stayed together in a clique, but they started to settle into the life of the large school towards the end of that year. He said:

In the first year I basically hung around with my friends from the small school, because I did not know anybody, so I said shag it . . . but now I know everybody out there. . . . Late in level one I started to feel more comfortable. . . . I go to dances out there every chance I get now, but at first I did not.

He stated that the school had done everything it could to make them feel welcomed. There was an assembly to welcome students on the first day of school and some teachers introduced new students to the class during the first class. He said:

They made us feel at home because the teacher used to talk to us just as much as they talked to the students from out there. . . . I think there were two teachers who introduced us in class. . . . The day we got there they took the first period and had an assembly to welcome the students back, the new students too.

Theodore felt that all students were treated equally, and there were no problems with students from both backgrounds mixing. There were some feelings of discrimination against students from the small school background in behavioral matters in the first year, which might have been brought on by the behaviour of the students. He stated:

When I was going to school here people who recently went to school at the large school used to tell us that all the teachers could not stand people from the small school, and the students could not stand us either, but as soon as I got out there I did not find that. . . . There are a couple of people out there, but you get that everywhere. . . . Back in grade ten stuff used to happen during school and most of the time the principal would call people from the small school, so I do not know . . . sometimes it felt like discrimination. . . . I remember last year when someone from that school did something and they called one person from the small school and blamed him for doing it, I knew the difference but did not say anything about it. That person kept on denying it so the teachers said okay, go on. . . . This person was a good student.

#### **Extra-curriculars and busing**

Theodore's participation in extra-curricular and social activities was about equal in both schools, and has remained constant throughout his high school years. He noted that it was difficult to join after school activities in the high school, since they were bused to school, and the bus left immediately after classes. It was a lot to expect of his father to pick him up from school since that would involve a

drive of sixty kilometres and his father worked all day. He stated:

I joined the table tennis team and the badminton team. I do not like playing sports in front of a lot of people, because I get all hot and nervous because they are all looking at me. Busing caused problems because if I did not come home on the bus dad had to come and get me, and that was hard on dad. . . . Dad gets off work at four o'clock and as soon as he got off work he had to drive all the way out there and home again. . . . I got involved anyway.

Theodore stated that the bus ride was very tiring and made for a long day. He said that the noise level on the bus was very difficult to tolerate and the tiring effect of that sometimes affected his ability to concentrate once he got to school. He saw the bus trip as something which had to be tolerated. He said:

It is something you have to do and you have to put up with it. . . . sometimes it interferes with work . . . it is tiring. . . . Going out it is not so bad but coming back they are all screaming out and jumping around and everything.

### **Final reflections**

Theodore expressed a feeling that he had been successful, overall, in his high school courses, but he had slacked off in his first year of high school and did poorly on some courses, which might necessitate an additional year of high school for him. He felt that some academic problems could be traced to not having done final examinations in the small school. He thought that final examinations in the

small school could have been a good preparation for the examinations which were required in high school. He said:

There was a problem here because, I think when I was in grade eight we had finals but the next year they were cut out so we did not have much background in doing finals, and out there it hit you, mid-terms and finals.

He contended that the small school did prepare him well for many aspects of high school and that if he could have done his high school courses in the small school he would have done better academically. He stated:

I think I probably would have done better here because the problem that I have is coming home on the bus I get very tired. . . . I know everybody here so it would have been no problem getting along socially.

However, he felt that he would not have learned as many social skills in the small school due to not having associated with as many different people. He said, "I would not have learned as many social skills because in such a small town everyone knows everyone." When asked if, as a senior student, he had noticed much difference between the new students entering the high school from the small school system and those from the large school system he stated:

The people who came here this year did the same thing we did in level one. The small school people are here and the large school people are there. . . . It seems to me that the small school people are louder and they are not afraid to do things.

Theodore really missed the opportunity to go home each day for a good hot lunch and the opportunity to be in class with all people that he knew. He said:



Going out there, during dinner times you have to take sandwiches every day and when I was here and went home to lunch mom would have spaghetti made, or hot dogs, or hamburgers, or anything at all made for me . . . so I miss that. They have some things out there but there is not much to it [some pre-made sandwiches in the canteen]. . . . When I was here I was in class with all my friends but out there you are all scattered around the place.

Theodore stated the advantages of the small school as, "the fact that you know everybody and you feel like you are one big family, and you help each other". He felt that, overall, a student could achieve more by attending the large school, due to the diversity of courses offered. He also stated that more social skills could be learned by attending the large school, since he had been exposed to a broader variety of social experiences. He said:

If I had stayed here in a small school I would not have learned as much of the things that you need to know. . . . The high school that was in our community only offered twenty something courses and I have brought home two sheets packed with courses . . . I think seventy five courses. . . . There was more variety of things to join and do.

Theodore would advise new students coming from the small school to the large school to work hard in courses so that they would not fall behind, because the teachers in the high school will not look out to them. He would also warn them that the teachers in the high school will not be tolerant of misbehaviour or deliberate disruption of class. He stated:

Do not slack off doing your homework and things because as soon as you do you will start to go down. Out there if you get behind the teachers just keep on going without you. Sometimes I can remember that in this school there were a couple of times when a student got a bit saucy and a teacher

just gave him notes and things, but out there if you got a bit saucy the teacher could just pick you up and give you a toss. . . . The teachers out there do not take any sauce, and if you are saucy the teachers could kick you out of the course, and if you are half way through the year that is bad.

He has had no thoughts of leaving school before graduating.

## **Ford**

Ford is an eighteen year old young man who transferred to the small school as a grade seven student, from another very similar small school in the same community. He was a very quiet but mischievous young man at that point. He had been struggling with his academics in his previous school and was often found to get into trouble with the teachers. At that point he was not particularly interested in school and seemed to get great pleasure from disrupting classes, and passing the blame for such actions to some other member of the class. He is very outgoing and likeable, and is well known for being highly involved in the teenage social scene of his community, and spending much of his time partying. It seems that he lived through that stage of a teenager's life at a young age and matured into a thoughtful young man who has a strong idea of what he wants to do with his life. He plans to become a heavy equipment operator after he graduates from high school.

### **Perceptions of the small school experience**

When asked to remember his years in the small schools in his community, he pointed out that he remembered that teachers in the small schools pushed students to do their work more than teachers in the large school did. He replied:

. . . Teachers are different out there than they are in here. Here they push you more to get your work done. . . . In the small school you had to

have your work done or you had to stay in after school, but out there if you do not have your work done, too bad, it is your tough luck.

He stated that he knew everyone in the small school, in contrast to the number of students he knew in the large school. He said:

I knew almost everyone, and got along with everyone here, but out there it is hard to know and get along with everyone, because there are so many people. . . . There are a lot of people I still do not know out there.

He reminisced about the fact that he got into a lot of mischief in the small school, and pointed out that he has grown out of such juvenile antics. He stated, "I used to get in more trouble when I was in the younger grades but I do not get into very much trouble now . . . I grew out of that." He added, "I liked going to this school. . . . It was all right. . . . It was a good experience, and if there was high school here I would be going here now." He pointed out that he found that misbehaviour was less likely to be tolerated in the large school. He stated, "it was more strict in the large school. Here you could get away with a little carrying on, but out there you were not allowed to do a thing, everything had to be perfect."

Ford articulated a feeling that multi-grade classes were bad, and sometimes very confusing. He found it difficult when programs were integrated for purposes of teaching one program to both grades in the classroom, since he was

sometimes working at a program for a grade level above his actual grade. He stated:

It was bad because sometimes you were in grade eight and you were doing grade seven work, or in grade seven doing grade eight work, rotating different years so you would be all fooled up. It is better with one grade in a classroom.

He felt that he was an average student in the small school, but he did not do his homework as he should have. He feels that he has changed for the better since he has been attending the high school and now spends some time keeping abreast of his work. He stated that he was an, "average student."

#### **Anticipation of the large school experience**

By the time he got in grade nine Ford felt that it was time for him to move on to a bigger school. That feeling was short lived. He said that when he was in grade nine he was really looking forward to attending school in the large school, but the experience has changed his opinion and he would now rather be in the small school. He said:

At first I did because I just wanted to try a new school to see what difference it would be, but not so much now I would just as soon not have to go back and forth out there. . . . Then I was dying to get out there, I could not wait.

Even though he had looked forward to attending the large school he found it difficult to fit into the life of the high school and quickly tired of it. He said, "I wanted to go to

the large school but after the first year I lost interest in it because I did not like beating back and forth".

Ford's biggest concern with the move to the large school was whether he would be able to fit in socially. He had heard stories that the social life in the large school was great, and he wanted to become part of it. His concerns were mostly about:

being able to fit in because people out there are totally different from people in here, there is a mixed bunch but in here everyone is all the same kind. . . . I did not know if I would fit in out there.

He did fit into the social life of the school and as he got to know more people it really did give him a more varied social life. He said:

On the week-ends they go to people's houses and have parties and a crowd of fellows get together . . . that is mostly why I wanted to go out there. . . to get to know people . . . I thought it would be a lot better. . . .

He had not been very active in the extra-curricular life of the small school, having been involved only in the volleyball team.

When asked if he would have chosen to remain in the small school to do high school, if he had been given that option in grade nine Ford stated:

The first year I would have tried it in the large school, but after the first year I did not like it because in here you know everyone and you would not have to get to know many people, so it would not be too hard on your nerves.

### **Impressions of the large school**

Ford's impression on entering the large school for the first time was of the number of people in the building. He felt out of place, that everyone was staring at him, and it made him very nervous. He stated:

The first day there you are walking around and you feel that everyone is staring at you, and you are a nervous wreck. . . . There is an awful crowd of people going there, because in the small school you walk down the hall and there would be a scattered person here and there, but out there you would have to work your way up through them and there were people just like ants, going all over the place. . . . People were going every which way and I had never seen any of them before.

It seemed strange to him that there were different wings to the building and he was restricted to the wings his classes were found in. He said, "It was divided into wings and there were no high school students allowed on the junior high wing, but in here there was just one corridor and you could go anywhere you wanted." He found that classes were much bigger in the larger school and that it was much more difficult to get the teacher's attention. He said:

The classrooms were a lot bigger and there were a lot more people in them. . . . If you wanted help you had to wait because seven or eight more people wanted help, but in here you just could go up to the teacher and he could help you right away.

He stated that his biggest adjustment was that he had to learn to control his behaviour. He said:

I had to change the way I acted, getting on with foolishness and nonsense, I had to smarten up because if you were carrying on you could get in a lot of trouble out there.

At first Ford worried that he would not be able to cope with the course work in the high school, but he quickly discovered that he could handle it if he put his mind to it. He stated:

I was a bit nervous afraid that I was going to fool it all up and not get any credits, and nervous about the teachers and the people that were out there, but after the first month or so it was all right. . . . Not at first, but after I got my mid-terms I started to worry, but after hockey was over I would get all good marks. I never used to study the first year but now I have come around a lot. . . . I could handle it.

He stated that he did not do well in courses in the first half of his first year in the large school, but he improved as the year progressed. He attributed his poor performance academically to paying too much attention to socializing and not enough to academics. He stated:

. . . I was nervous about being out there and I was not paying attention, I was paying more attention to hockey than to doing my work, but after hockey was over my marks picked up.

Ford articulated a feeling that he had been well prepared for high school by the small school, since he found that most high school courses were a continuation of what he had been doing in the small school. He found mathematics difficult and attributed it to the size of the class. He said:

I was well prepared because most of the work you do in grade seven, eight, and nine is almost identical to what you do in grades ten, eleven, and twelve. . . . The only thing that was different was math, the math was a lot harder. . . . That was just because the class was so much bigger, there were a lot of



people in the math class, and we were used to only ten or eleven.

He found the size of the class very intimidating and was too shy to speak out and ask for help. He stated:

. . . Well I was more or less nervous to answer the question if the teacher called on me because I was afraid if I got it wrong everyone would probably laugh at me and stare, so I would never answer a question. I would say I do not have it done or I have the wrong answer because I was afraid everyone would be looking at me.

He stated that he found the students from the large school system, who were in his classes, to have been more comfortable in the large classes than him, but had about the same level of knowledge as he did, although it seemed to him that they did not have the practical ability to apply what they knew to everyday situations. In his terms they did not seem to have any "common sense". He stated:

I do not think they knew more than me, just that they all knew each other and they were more comfortable. . . . We were pretty well the same, in some subjects they probably knew a bit more and in other subjects I knew a bit more . . . they had about the same knowledge as I had. . . . Mostly it was the common sense stuff, I often knew what the teacher was talking about, but some of the others might not know.

### **Socialization**

Ford found that the teachers and staff of the high school made an effort to make the new students in their school feel welcomed. An assembly was held on the first day of school to welcome everyone, and especially the new students. He stated:

The teachers did and the older students from the small school, but it did not seem like the students did. . . . the teachers introduced you to the class. The first day there was an assembly and they said they would like to welcome all the new students. That is done every year. . . . I do not think they could have done much more than that.

He stated that generally the students from the small school did not mix well in the first year in high school, but by the end of that year they had become well assimilated into the school life. He said:

The first year there was one spot by the wall and when you walked down the hall there would be people from the small school lined up all along the wall . . . now everyone is just mixed together.

He did not find it to be as difficult as most students due to the fact that he had a friend who was from the large community, who introduced him to many students. He stated:

In the first year I got to know a lot of people, because I was buddying around with a fellow out there in grade eleven and he knew a lot of people. I got to know all of his friends, and then I made my own friends. . . . I fit in pretty well.

Ford found that there was not much social discrimination in the large school, although he could identify a snob group within the students from the large school system. He felt that some people did not want the students from outside their community to be involved in their school. He said:

There was a certain bunch in my first year, mostly grade twelves, who were saying things, not to our faces, but you could see them looking at you and then talking about you. . . . It was not everyone, just a certain bunch . . . people who thought themselves to be too high up. . . . You would not notice it as much in here because you would not be looking for it, but out there you were looking for it, because of the stories you heard that the

people out there hated the people from here. . . .  
It is almost as if they do not want the people from  
here out there now.

He indicated that when things were working smoothly there was no problem but when important decisions had to be made it seemed that the students from the large community felt that their needs and ideas should get priority. He said:

At the graduation we have a toast to the teachers and a toast to the parents, and two people from here got to do them, just by having their names picked, and the people in the graduating class thought that should not have been. . . . The feeling was what are they doing out here anyway, we do not want them in our graduation.

He stated that occasionally he felt that there was some academic discrimination toward students who had come from the small school, in that teachers marked harder for them, but such feelings were rare and only isolated cases. He said:

There is one teacher who does not like people from our community. . . . He said that a couple of times, and students on both sides are like that sometimes . . . it works both ways. . . . In literature I used to get good marks but if you have that certain teacher and you get sixty on your first test, then that is what you will get for the rest of the course. . . . I do not think it was the same for everybody, but he tended to be harder in giving marks to people from our community. There was a person who got a paper from a couple of years ago and the person got ninety on it, and he wrote it out and passed it in, and he only got sixty . . . there had to be something going on.

#### **Extra-curriculars and busing**

Ford stated that he hated the bus trip to the high school each day. He found that it was very tiring and left him tired and lazy, and then it was difficult to recover in

school. He found that it was impossible to get any work done on the bus and the long day did not leave much time for personal pursuits. He said:

I hate it, can not stand it, I would rather walk. . . . It made you tired because it was very hot on the bus and you got groggy and lazy, then when you got to school it took a couple of periods before you woke up again. Now it is not so bad because there are not as many people this year and it is more comfortable. . . . I could never do any work on the bus because when you hit a bump your books would go all over the place. . . . On the way home you get very tired . . . you do not get much time to yourself during the week.

#### **Final reflections**

Ford felt that he had done well in the large school and that it had prepared him well for public examinations. He thought that the small school had prepared him well for high school because having been forced to do his work had set a pattern of working in him. He said:

You were better prepared in here because the teachers said you had to do things and when you got out there you figured things would be the same way, so you kept on doing your work, it just grew on you and never changed. . . . It did a lot of good for me.

Ford stated that when he watched new students entering the high school from the small school it was very noticeable that they were different from the other students entering the high school for the first time. He noticed that they talked and dressed differently from the students who came from the large school system. He stated:

Everyone is the same except that they talk differently from people from the large town and they dress differently, but it sort of rubs off after a while and the people from here wear the same as people from there. . . . Everyone is about the same, there is the occasional different person, but most are the same. . . . Their clothes are different . . . I pity them.

He stated that in the first few weeks there was a "tension" which, you could, "cut with a knife", between the students from the different backgrounds. He said:

The people in grade ten are just getting to know each other and you can feel a tension between them . . . they are afraid to talk to each other . . . you can almost cut it with a knife there is that much there.

He observed that the students from the small school quickly adapted to the ways and fashions of the large school and in a short time the tension disappeared. He said that from that time on they were, "all the same, as students go. . . . It is not so much now because the year is almost over. He added that his social life has improved since he began school in the large school. He said:

My social life has increased a lot because almost every weekend I go to the large community and there is lots to do, but if I stay here there is not much to do. . . . I know a lot more people in the large community now.

Ford would advise the new students entering the large school, from the small school, to be themselves and to take responsibility for themselves, since the teachers in the high school would not take responsibility for them. He would advise them to:

Act normally, do not go out of your way to make friends. Come with someone who has been there for a while and they will introduce you to people and you will get to know everyone, and it will not take long . . . just be yourself. . . . The teachers are a lot more slack out there than they are here, if you do not have your work done that is your tough luck, it is no good for you to go to the teacher and say anything, it is your own responsibility . . . the teachers keep on you to get your work done in here, but out there if you do not have it done, too bad.

Ford stated that what he missed the most about attending the small school in his community was the opportunity to go home at lunch hour and have a good lunch and some time to relax. He stated:

I used to miss dinners because when I was here I would go home to something hot but out there you have to take sandwiches every day, . . . and eating in peace, because out there about sixty people are eating in one room and there would be chip bags and paper bags going everywhere. . . . You had to have your back to the wall.

Ford felt that the strength of the small school was its close feeling, and thought that he could have achieved as much in the small school as he did in the large school. He said:

You get to know people better and you do not be as nervous. . . . My early years in the small school helped me because I got better prepared for some of the courses out there. I probably would have gotten just as much here. . . . I do not think the courses were much harder in the large school, but where there were more people in the classes it was harder to get help from the teacher.

He felt that the strength of the large school lay in the variety of course and social experiences it could offer students. He felt that the large school did a good job of

encouraging students to take responsibility for their own work. He stated:

You get to know more people and there are more courses. A school is a school but out there you have to do more work than in here. . . . Out there they pushed you to stand on your own two feet. If you did not want to do your work, do not do it, but it would benefit you to do it. But, in here you had to do your work.

Ford had never considered leaving school before graduating.

### Philip

Philip is eighteen years old, and a very intelligent, sociable young man, who is very highly active in sports. He has always found it fairly easy to achieve in school courses with a minimum of effort. He chose high school courses which he knew would allow him to graduate with the least amount of work. He took as many hands on, practical courses as he possibly could, to avoid study and homework. In courses where study and homework were required he calculated which portions of the courses he could avoid doing, and still receive a passing grade. If homework was worth twenty percent of a course final grade he would judge that he could pass the course without it, and therefore not do any. He stated:

My three years out there were pretty easy, I calculated everything I needed to get and how lazy I had to be, and it has worked perfectly for me, and is still working perfectly now. . . . I do just enough work to get through everything.

It seems that his calculations were fairly accurate, since he regularly passed his courses and is in a position to graduate, although his grades, as would be expected, were rather low. He now regrets having done that, since he can see that it has closed some doors to him, and has limited his choices for further study and careers. He is a sociable young man who is well liked by his teachers and classmates. He plans to study air traffic control or underwater welding after graduating from high school.



### Perceptions of the small school experience

On being asked about his memories of life in the small school his immediate response was of all his participation in sports programs after school. He participated in everything that was offered in sports as well as science and computer clubs. He stated:

I remember mainly the after school, mainly the sports. I could get in the sports because I was in the same town, so I could get access to the sports a lot better here, and a lot of times teachers would say, "okay we will go down for fun," that was about the most I can remember about here. . . . I took part in volleyball, basketball, table tennis, computers, and science club. . . . I stayed in school almost every day after school almost ever since I had been here, except when I was in the lower grades.

He stated that the pace of learning was slower in the small school than in the large school, and that the teacher would not move on to another topic until the previous topic was understood. He said:

Teaching was slower, when we were in grade eight or nine you had a lot more time to do math. The teacher would go a lot slower, and if you did not understand it he would keep doing it to make sure you understood it.

He contrasted that to the pace of teaching in the large school.

In the large school the teacher says I cannot go through it any more, if you do not understand it get a tutor because I have to finish the course, because it is a public course, so you do not have any time.

He also remembered that there were a lot of special activities, such as field trips. He said, "Education week

here you would do something all week, and there was always something planned. That was good too."

Philip said that if the teacher thought that students were weak in a subject area he/she could give that area extra class time. Most of his memories of the small school were pleasant, but the teacher's control over the timetable often bothered him. The teacher often spent extra classes on subject areas when he felt it was time to take a break from it and do something different. He felt that the teacher often did this on a whim and it made the day seem long and a little boring for the students. He said:

The one main part I did not like about this school was I would look on my schedule and it was math, social studies, this and that, but when I got in class it was math, math, math, math, every class was math or every class was something else, and that used to get me mad. . . . The timetable could change any time and I did not understand why they had a schedule on the go, I did not understand it. . . . I did not think the teacher should have that freedom, because I was waiting for something else to have a break. All I could do was laugh. . . . Sometimes an enjoyable class would be doubled and you did not mind.

He felt that it was because the teacher wanted to spend more time on certain subjects, because of his bias, but he acknowledged that the teacher could have had a higher motive for doing that. He stated:

I think that was because when the teacher got into a topic he did not want to stop. . . he wanted to make sure everybody understood it all too, he had his own reasons and they were good reasons. . . . Most of the time he liked math that much that he just wanted to keep doing math, but then sometimes when I would think that, he would do two or three social studies classes.

He reflected that he did less homework in the high school because he was not checked on as he was in the small school.

He said:

In the large school I have been exactly the same way, or I have probably done a little less out there. Out there a lot of teachers do not care. Most of them say if you do not have it done we are going on to the next chapter anyway . . . so it is my own problem, and usually when it is my own problem I do not bother with it.

He felt that the small school provided a better working environment, in that classes were more relaxed and informal. He appreciated the opportunity to take part in after school activities in the small school. He said:

The best thing about in class was it was relaxed most of the time. It was not really strict and you could turn around and get in groups, and if you did your work you could stay in groups. There was a lot of relaxing, talking, and joking in classes in this school and you can work better that way. . . .

Philip did not remember much about the multi-grade classroom, but suggested that there might have been some wasted time in that type of class. He stated:

I do not really remember being in a classroom with two grades together, I do not think there was ever any problems with that, except when the teacher was setting work for the other grade we would be all talking and he would get mad and set something for us, and the others would start talking. As soon as he left you alone you were talking.

He could not remember having any problems with programs that were integrated to accommodate both grades in a multi-grade situation. At least:

not when you were in lower grades like this because there was not much of an age difference, so there

should not be much of a problem. You were pretty young and everybody thought they were the same age anyway. . . . When they got out of class everybody was hanging around together anyway, so I did not see any problem with that stuff.

#### **Anticipation of the large school experience**

Philip stated that in his last two or three years in the small school he was really looking forward to the time when he would go to the large high school. In his words he was, "dying for the chance to go to the high school". One thing which he looked forward to was the chance to move from class to class, since he felt that it would provide a welcomed break from the monotony of the classroom. From his friends he heard mainly stories about the social life in the high school and that it was no problem to skip classes, since the teachers did not seem to care if you were not there. He stated:

I heard a lot about the social life in the large community, that there was always something going on out there. . . . I heard that you could skip off, if you did not want to deal with classes one day you could go on, if they do not see you they will not catch you. They do not look at attendance, half of the teachers do not care, and they did not know if you were in the class or not.

He thought that the big advantage of attending the larger school would be in meeting so many different people. He reflected that it was not as good as he had expected in the first year. He said:

Mainly I was looking forward to meeting a whole bunch of different girls . . . but I never really met as many as I have this year because I know everyone in the graduating class. . . . I have had

three good years out there socially, I was with everybody and everybody liked me . . . so I had a good teen-aged life out there, and I would have missed out on that here. . . . I would say that it has increased in grade twelve only because of the graduation.

Philip felt that he was very well prepared for high school when he graduated from grade nine. He stated that he had a particularly easy time in high school with courses since he chose the easiest courses possible. He reflected that such course selections might not have been the best for him in the long run. He stated:

I thought I would do all right and I did all right too, but I was not really confident until I went out there and did it, and it was the same thing as anything else, all you had to do was write a few more notes. I still was not doing any homework and the best thing was he did not care if I did it, so I felt that I did not have to do it. . . . Last year I was in chemistry and it was a bit difficult so I dropped it and took Phys. Ed., I said I would take the easier route since I did not need chemistry.

He got far more freedom in the high school than he ever expected he could get. He did not have any fears about fitting in socially, but found that he was very shy about speaking up in classes. He said:

I figured I was going to fit in, but it was just that in a classroom with thirty five people in it, even if I know them all I will not speak up, I want to say something but I still will not do it. I get red and embarrassed as soon as I say something. That is what I was like in grade ten.

If Philip had been presented with a choice in grade nine he would have chosen to attend the larger school, since it provided so many new people to meet. He felt that the large

school was also the best choice since it offered such a wide variety of courses to choose from. He stated:

I would have gone to the large school, because of all the good things I heard about it and I was getting sick of going to this same school all the time. You get to meet two hundred new people and it is a totally different place and now I can stay here one weekend and go out there the other. . . . I knew it would take me a while to get tired of that place. . . . I would have gone to the large school for the courses, . . . they do have a lot of good courses out there.

#### **Impressions of the large school**

Philip's impression of the large school, on arriving there for the first time, was of being singled out and scrutinized by everyone. He reported having a feeling of being an outsider and feeling "paranoid" for the first few weeks in the large school. He found it difficult to go into classes where there was no one he knew, but when someone approached him and spoke it broke the ice and made him feel a little better. He stated:

First when I got out there the classes were bigger and there was no one in them I knew. In some of them there was not one person I knew, and I am not the type for meeting people. I was saying I was going to meet all these girls, but it is a different story when you get there and everybody is looking at you. . . . You are wondering where do I get my locker number, and what do I do now. It takes about a couple of months before you get into it . . . when you are walking down the hall you are not paranoid. . . . It was like we were singled out. Nobody was really looking at me, it was just that I felt like that inside. . . . Four or five of us were standing around talking and trying not to draw any attention to ourselves. In the middle of the day a couple of guys came up and that helped because they wanted to talk to us. We did not go

over to them, we just sort of floated together and started talking. We got to know each other and it grew from there. . . . That was good for me in the first day because I got to know three or four new people and went around with them, and they knew everybody.

He did not get any help in fitting in from the students who were in higher grades from his own community. He said:

All the grade elevens and twelves were gone, they knew everything about it and went on. It was like this year the grade tens went out there and we went on, I am not going to hang around with grade tens, I have my own things to do and I hang around with people from the large community. . . . The feeling of being an outsider was gone after a couple of days.

The biggest difference which Philip found between the large school and the small school was in the size of classes and the presence of older students in his classes. He was very shy to speak up in class. He said:

One big difference was the size of classes, and students from all high school levels mixed together in classes. Only a few would speak up, those in grade twelve because they did not care . . . I would not say anything and I will not say anything now in big classes.

He indicated that he has made some progress in that regard, but it remains difficult for him, even now. He stated:

I had to do presentations and things and I do not mind them now, I will get up and talk now. . . . If there were twenty people in the hall I could talk and everybody else listened, but when there were twenty people in the classroom and the teacher was listening too I would turn red.

He found a drop of about twenty percent in his grades, on about half of his courses, in his first year in high school, while the other half of his grades remained about the same as

they had been in the small school. He felt that there was not the same level of caring in the large school as in the small school, so the teacher did not monitor the students work closely. If a student did not speak up and let the teacher know that he needed help the teacher would not know, and Philip was not going to speak up in a large class, no matter how much trouble he was having. He stated:

In this school you would take more time going over it before you took notes, the teacher would explain it more. . . . Out there he would say write this, do you all understand it? Nobody would say anything, especially if we were all in grade ten no one was going to say anything. I did not care if I understood or not, I was not going to say anything. . . . I would rather fail the course than turn red once. I am not half as bad now, I talk in all the classes . . . grade twelve is the best year . . . you learn more too . . . every class except literature, where there are thirty five students.

Speaking up in large classes was one of the biggest adjustments he had to make. The other was to eating lunches in the school, which he found very difficult, He said:

A big adjustment was the lunches. At the end of grade ten I started getting sick of sandwiches, and I would not fool around with getting anything hot. . . . That bothered me too and I do not take sandwiches now. In grade ten I was paranoid to take anything, everyone took sandwiches . . . afraid, paranoid, shy, I do not know what it was. Now I take apple juice and heat up ravioli and things like that. That is all I eat now.

Philip felt that in level one he knew as much or more than those students who were in his classes from the large school background. He said:

I know I did, because some from the small school in the class before me were getting the highest marks out there [his sister's class], and in this class I



am doing as well as most fellows . . . you always get a few who get really high marks, but not many fellows, I tell you.

He stated that the students who came from the large school system were no better prepared for high school than those who came from the small school. The students from the large school system were not ahead of those from the small school in any way which he could determine. He noticed that the people from the large school system did not seem to have any common sense in applying what they learned to the real world. He stated:

To tell you the truth a lot of them out there do not have any common sense at all. I do not know where I learned it, or where most of us did, . . . out there they know how to read a book, and how to study, but they do not know anything else. . . . They do not know what it applies to in the real world. They know what it applies to on a test. We used to get lower marks, but I still think I was smarter than them, because they did not know what to do, they did not even know how to cook. . . . They were no more prepared for grade ten than we were.

He felt that now that they have spent three years together they have mingled and no difference can be found between those who came from the large school system and those who came from the small school. He said, "When you are all interacting everybody gets mixed together and we learn from each other . . . and it is like you knew each other for twenty years."

### Socialization

It seems that for many young people a change of schools is a very traumatic experience, socially, but this change did not seem to be too difficult for Philip. He reported that he fitted in very well, since he had a girlfriend in the large community and he hung around with the older students. He said:

When I went out there I had already been going out with a couple of girls from there so I knew a few of them, that is why I could fit in socially. One of them was older than me, so I hung around with people older than me, and I did not hang around with people in grade ten much . . . so I fit in.

Philip detected no social discrimination against him, although he thought that some students who came from the small school might have experienced some. He stated:

The people from our community are together but you do not mean to be, once everybody starts coming in the people from our community are standing around talking . . . we might as well talk for an hour since we are there. When the others come in I go off with my girlfriend, but there is still four or five who stay in the same spot every day. . . . not with me [in reference to discrimination] . . . it might be in ten and eleven, but I do not see it.

Philip felt that teachers and staff did make an effort to make new students in their school feel comfortable and welcomed. He felt that, overall, the students who came from outside the large community were treated very well. He said:

Some teachers made me feel welcomed. They talked and joked around. . . . One teacher wanted to get to know your name and he would not forget it . . . he made you feel like you were in that school for a while. . . . They are pretty good for people out of town because every once in a while they would have dinner for free, hot dogs and that, if they had

some things left over from cooking. Sometimes they would order out for us, for two dollars each, it was just a change.

He was particularly annoyed, and disappointed, that some teachers could not seem to remember his name, even though he was in their class.

Some teachers do not remember your name, that used to piss me off a little bit because you are there four or five months and teachers do not know your name. . . . They just say you. . . . They are asking you questions and I do not even want to answer them when they do not know my name.

Philip felt some feelings of discrimination against those students who came from the small school, in that they seemed to be blamed more often than others when something happened in the school. He felt that it might have been reasonable on the part of the teachers, since those students often were guilty of causing problems. He stated:

The way they go about it, it is hard to say. . . . The fire alarm was pulled and someone from the large community did it, we know who it was, we saw her. They blamed us for it. Everything that is done out there we are usually blamed for, but there is a good reason why, because most things that are done out there are done by students from our community. Because of that we get blamed for everything, but not all the time for good reason. . . . four of us got kicked out for flooding bathrooms and neither of us did it. . . . The principal said that he had to kick someone out, and we knew who did it, but I said so did everyone else in the school. What are you kicking us out for? He said he had to start somewhere and we had to eat our lunch outside for three days. He knew we did not do it too, that was not fair.

In general, he felt that there was no academic discrimination, except with one teacher in his case, but he

felt that it could have been a personality clash rather than due to where he was from. He said:

There is a teacher out there and he gives me the same mark no matter what I do. In art he gives me a sixty . . . and others get eighty, I did not understand it and I got in an argument one day and then all my marks were eighties. I do not know what his problem was with me, it might have been where I was from, I do not know . . . a lot of us from our community he gives low marks to . . . but it could be just that he does not like me and another guy from our community. . . . It could be just coincidence, I do not know.

#### **Extra-curriculars and busing**

Extra-curricular activities were a very important part of Philip's life in the small school, but he did not avail of opportunities to take part in such activities in the large school. He got involved in the volleyball team in his first year in high school, but had to give it up because of transportation problems and difficulties in getting playing time, due to stiff competition from other team members. He did not get involved in much else. He stated that he would have gotten involved in much more if it had not been for the problems of finding transportation after school. He stated:

In grade ten I got involved in volleyball for a little while and it was hard to get rides, and they would not give you a chance, they would not put you on the court, and if they were going to a tournament they would not have room to take me unless I found my own ride. . . . It was not fair because I was picked for the team and then I was not going, and when I did go I did not get to play. I got in soccer last year, but I could not handle the rides again. It was getting cold and I could not hitch hike home. You do not want to be going back and forth with rides after having a hard

workout you want to go home to relax. I am just starting to leave and the others are home, and it takes me a hour and a half to get home. . . . I was not really determined like I should have been, but if it was not for that I would have taken part in a lot more. . . . My experience in grade ten turned me. What was the point of going to all the trouble of arranging for a place to stay and packing clothes if I was not going to get a chance to play. In the last two years they have been looking for me to play but I have not bothered . . . I still have the problem of finding rides.

Philip found the bus trip to be difficult, since the noise level was very hard to deal with. He stated that the bus trip might have a detrimental effect on grades since students are tired before they reach school in the mornings. He said:

That is bad. I hate the bus, I hate it! First and second year it was not bad because everything was quiet. . . . In grade twelve it is bad, getting up early . . . freezing . . . grade tens bawling out and laughing, and I hate noise. It is too long . . . and then the bumps. . . . When I get out there I am still not really awake, because I am sleeping on the bus . . . when I get in school I am dead tired.

### **Final reflections**

In looking back on the years he spent in both schools Philip felt that his small school experience did not in any way hinder his achievement in high school. Courses in the small school were taught slower and were easier to understand. He said:

It did not make it difficult, the education here was slower than out there. It was taught slower, but it seemed that there was more time to teach it . . . It probably equalled out where there were

less people and the teacher could teach slowly and still do a lot.

And, that understanding was carried over to classes in the large school. He stated:

. . . In grade nine we did a lot more math than we should have, and it helped me in grade ten. That is why I got a good mark in grade ten. . . . I know it helped me because everybody else was failing and I was getting eighties.

He felt that he would have gotten better academic grades if he had stayed in the small school to do high school. He said, "If it was the same teachers here and you could have grades ten, eleven, and twelve in this school I probably would have gotten all eighties or nineties." He believed that because he felt that the adjustment to new teaching styles was the reason for the academic difficulties he had during his first year in the large school. He stated:

In the small school I was used to the teaching methods, and knew exactly what to prepare for and what to expect. If you were either bit smart you could get good marks. . . . Their teaching methods were totally different, so I had to get used to that too.

He noted that he had not done as well as he should have in high school, and that he had no marks to be proud of. He did feel that he had learned a lot of practical skills in the large school, such as cooking. He said:

I do not think I did that well, I could have done a lot better. . . . Those courses I got eighty in were no big accomplishment because of the type of course it was, I should not be proud of it. If you got eighty on a difficult course you could look at your report card and be proud of it. I am not proud of any of my good marks, I did not do what I could have done. . . . For practical courses I have

been successful, but not academically. I would say I learned a lot, but looking at my report card it does not look like I learned a lot. I did two foods courses and I can cook anything. I know that helped me because we did a lot of practical work.

On watching new students enter the large school, from the small school, Philip noticed that they seem to be scared at first, but they very quickly assimilate. The adjustment seems to be easier for some than for others. He stated:

This year I noticed that most of them got to know a lot of people quickly, not last years though. . . . They were paranoid. . . . So many go off and meet everybody and others then just stay around.

He would advise those going to the large school in the future to relax and everything will fit in place in its own time.

He said:

Relax when you get out there. It is no big deal . . . the students out there want to meet you too. Everything will fit in place. . . . You do not have to be tense and trying to make friends, just be the same as you are. If you have a good personality you are going to meet people anyway.

Philip saw the strengths of the small school as being that it provides smaller classes with more individual attention, and everyone in the class is more familiar and relaxed. He stated:

There is one teacher for less students, that is a big advantage. You get a lot more learning from the teacher, one on one, . . . after school activities, and you get to know the teacher a lot better. There are less people so you are more relaxed and you can talk in class.

He saw the advantages of the large school as being that it provides more freedom and choice and a greater variety of experiences. He said:

You have a lot more freedom . . . you get choice of your own courses . . . you get a break every period, and it is a good social life if you are easy going. . . . There are a whole lot of people for you to meet and a whole new life, almost. . . . There are more courses too. . . . I took as many practical courses as I could, except those I had to do. . . . I did not think I was going to get that much freedom.

Philip stated that while attending the large school he really missed the opportunity to go home for a good lunch, and being close to the school so that he could participate in sports after school. He stated:

There are three or four things I miss, I miss going just across the road for lunch and returning at the last minute. I miss being able to go to school even if I happen to sleep in. Another thing I miss is sports after school, it could be just for fun. You could stay here and teachers did not mind. They trusted you to stay in and left you alone, unless you did something wrong. Another thing is that the courses here were taught slower and you could understand it. . . . I probably learned more here than I think I learned.

Philip disliked not being able to take part in sports due to transportation problems while he attended the large school.

He stated:

I could not get in any sports, that was bad too. I was trying to get home and I would have to hitch hike and it was so hard for me that I finally gave up on it. . . . No arrangements were made for practices during lunch hour or anything, it was like "we do not need you guys anyway, it is not like we are going to cry if you are gone". They did not care. . . . They say that they care if you pass and things, but sometimes they give you things like they do not care if you are there after school or not . . . they do not say that but that is what they mean.

Philip never entertained thoughts of leaving school before graduation. He said,



I love it out there, the only bad things are the sports and the bus, but I can deal with that, so it is not too bad. . . . I can do sports outside the school and I am okay with that. . . . When I turned eighteen it occurred to me that I was old enough to drop out of school. It had never occurred to me before.

**Sidney**

Sidney is eighteen years old, very quiet, and enjoys taking part in all kinds of sports. He found it very difficult to make the transition from a small school to a large one, and transferred to a small school in his area, which offered high school courses, after one year in the large school being studied. Unfortunately for him, that school closed after he had attended it for one year, and he was forced to return to the large school to complete his high school education. He is well liked by friends and teachers and hopes to study electronics after graduating from high school. Those who know him feel that he has not given his studies the kind of effort which is required if he is to do well academically.

**Perceptions of the small school experience**

In reminiscing about his schooling in the small school Sidney pointed out that he took part in all the sports he could, which meant he was involved in sports almost every day. He was also a member of the chess club. He stated that the small school was the best school which he has experienced, since the teachers were fair and available. He felt that he could avail of as much help as he needed in the small school, and contrasted that with the large school. He stated:

Sports were good, I took part in all I could . . . mostly every day. . . . I got in a scattered club,

like the chess club. . . . It was the best actually, the better part of going to school. . . . I found the teachers fair, they talked to you and would sit down with you. . . . In the large school you do not get as much help as you want. . . . Here you knew what everything was about because the teachers were always here for you.

Sidney did not think that everything was great about the small school. He felt that the school did not have much money because, "When we went away on tournaments we had to get our own rides". He also felt that the teachers had too much control over the timetable. He stated that often the teacher would change the timetable to do classes in whichever subject he/she saw fit. He felt that this depended on what the teacher's favourite subject was, but it got rather monotonous for students when they did too many classes of the same subject some days. He said, "He did not go by the schedule. . . . Sometimes we would have three math periods right in a row. . . . It depended on how the teacher felt".

Sidney felt that multi-grade classes were not a problem, since he was in class with all of his friends. He remembered that integrated programs to accommodate the two grades in a multi-grade classroom did not seem to be any different to him than having one grade in the room. He stated:

I found it all right because most of my buddies were in the other class anyway, so with two of them combined we had better gym periods together, because you had all your friends there. . . . I found it all right, because, like it is in the large school now [referring to the fact that age groups are mixed in high school courses], it does not make much difference if we are together or not.

He felt that he was a good student who kept up on his work in the small school, and received middle of the road grades. He reflected that he has slacked off on his work in the years since. He stated that he was, "Half decent I suppose. . . . in the younger grades but when I got in the higher grades I slacked off. . . . sixties and seventies".

#### **Anticipation of the large school experience**

Like most of his classmates, when Sidney was in grade nine he was really looking forward to attending the large high school in a different community, but he reflected that when he got there his outlook changed. When it was discussed that some of the small school students really looked forward to moving to the large school he said, "That is what I said too until I got out there. . . . I would say that if this school had a high school I would be here instead of at the large school". He had heard stories from his friends about the idiosyncracies of the teachers in the large school. He had also heard that the work was much more difficult than in the small school and that you could get away with not doing your homework there. He stated:

Some stories were making fun of the teachers. . . . I heard there was a greater variety of girls out there. . . . I heard that it was a lot harder than this place . . . a lot of homework. . . . You used to be able to get away with not doing your homework, but they have cut down on that now.

He looked forward to the promise of more social opportunities and meeting many new people in the large school. He said he

was looking forward to, "being with a different group, getting to know more people . . . more sports teams". He felt that teachers were more qualified, and it would be good to be able to choose his own courses rather than having to do whatever courses were offered. He meant more qualified in the sense that there were teachers in the large school who were qualified to teach courses that were not offered in the small school. He stated, "They had teachers with better education . . . you could pick the subjects you wanted. . . . They offered workshop, power mechanics, and cooking".

On leaving the small school Sidney felt confident in his ability to do the high school work. He had some concerns about mathematics and he found that he actually did poorly in that subject in his first year of high school. He said:

I thought I would be able to get through. . . . I figured I knew just as much as they did. . . . I was not sure of math because I was not that good at math. . . . I failed math in the first year.

If he had been given a choice when he was in grade nine he would have chosen to stay in the small school to complete his high school years. He felt that he would have done much better academically in the small school due to the availability of more individual help. However, he pointed out that social variety and sports opportunities may not have been as good in the small school. He stated:

I would say that I would have done better, passed all of my subjects . . . because the help was there. . . . The social life would not have been as good. . . . We never had the students to have a lot of teams.

### **Impressions of the large school**

On entering the large school for the first time Sidney was overwhelmed with the size of the building and the fact that he did not know many of the students. He had a strong feeling that everyone was looking at him. Entering the large school was socially "scary" at first, but that did not last long. He said that it was, "big, real big . . . getting to know everybody . . . everybody looking at you. . . . I knew a few people anyway before I went out there. . . . I was scared at first, but I blended in". He stated that the biggest adjustment which he had to make was in the amount of time and effort that was required to do the work. He said his biggest adjustment was, "the time that you had to put into studies. . . . The amount of time and effort that was required. . . . They piled the homework on". He could not get help from teachers after school, as he was used to doing in the small school, due to the fact that he travelled on the bus. He stated, "You could always stay after school here, the teachers would be here for a while and they could help you after school". He also found it difficult to adjust to the size of the classes, in that he was reluctant to join in the discussions and to ask questions. He stated:

I had to get used to the big classes . . . thirty people in a class, as compared to ten in here. . . . You did not like putting up your hand because you did not know anybody there . . . you just go on and do your work by yourself.

Sidney stated that he did not do very well, academically, in his first year of high school, but he has improved since that. He stated that he could say that the adjustment to the large school was the major factor in his poor performance but he really had not applied himself as he should have. He felt that he has made that adjustment. He said:

I lost three credits. . . . I am passing everything now. . . . I knew I had to buckle down to it this year. . . . Part of it was my fault and part of it was adjusting to the large school. . . . The teacher puts pressure on to work hard. . . . I do all my work now.

When he first entered the large school Sidney felt that he would do the same, academically, as he had in the small school, and he was surprised by the drop in his grades. He felt that the teachers in the small school had done their best and prepared him well for high school. He stated:

I thought I would do the same as I did here . . . I thought I would get my math out there because I always got my math here. . . . I dropped in most subjects. . . . The small school prepared us the best that it could.

Sidney stated that he believed that he was on the same level as the people from the large school system who were in his class in the first year of high school. There was a natural spread in ability levels in the class, and he judged himself to have been average. He said:

I would say there was a share of people who were the same as me, who used to get the same marks as I did, you always have smart people, middle, and failures. . . . Classes averaged out the same. . . . Some got good marks when they were here and when

they went out there they got good marks. You always knew as much as some other people and there were some people who knew more than you.

When asked if he felt that the people who came from the large school system may have been more used to large classes than he was he responded, "They could have been, where they only had one grade in a class."

### **Socialization**

While some students found it very difficult to fit into the social life of the large school it did not pose any problems for Sidney. He reported that it did not take him long to fit in socially, and that he was assimilated into the school after the first year. He said, "After a couple of weeks I got to know almost everybody. Some of them were afraid of the crowd from our community . . . I mixed with everybody, it did not bother me". He said that after the first year he really got involved in the social life in the large community. He stated:

Not really in the first year because my girlfriend was from here so I did not have much to do with it out there. In grade ten I only used to go out there a scattered time, but this year I go out there all the time, and stay out there Friday and Saturday, and come home Sunday. . . . I would go to a dance or a party at a buddy's house. . . . That was a good part of going there, because you got to know some people outside of school too.

When asked if the students from the small school stuck together as a group in the large school he answered, "In the first year but that is all". He did get a feeling that one



or two teachers on the staff of the large school may have felt that the students from the small school should not have been in that school. He stated that, "Some teachers said go back to the small community where you belong. . . . Only one or two teachers felt that way". That was not actually stated by the teachers, but was felt by this student. He also felt that students from the small school were too often accused of wrong doing, and sometimes unjustly so. He said:

Things were blamed on the students from the small school . . . more than what was normal. . . . I would say we do a share, but everybody does some. . . they do not know who did it so they should not blame it on us.

He did not notice any social discrimination once he got adjusted to the school. He stated that the teachers in the large school were friendly and made the new students feel welcomed. He took their friendliness to be a ploy to get them to stay in that school. On the first day of school there was an assembly to welcome all the students back to school. He stated:

I think so, at first they used to try to suck you into going to their school and make you feel welcomed there. . . . The first day they welcomed all the students back to school and they welcomed all of the small school crowd too. . . . Where there was such a big crowd they could only do so much. . . . most of the teachers were friendly.

He reported that he noticed no discrimination in academic grading, that all students were treated equally, and that he received the grades which he deserved. He said, "Whatever mark I got I deserved".

### **Extra-curriculars and busing**

Sidney had spent every minute he could taking part in extra-curricular activities while he was in the small school, but he did not get involved in much in the large school. He stated that he did not take part in many activities in his first year in the high school, but he did play some sports. He found busing to be a problem for taking part in activities after school. He stated:

I played volleyball, basketball, and floor hockey. . . . I was on the decorating committee for the graduation. It depended on how many were there, we had to take turns getting rides. . . . Most of the time we could take turns and get rides.

Sidney stated that he really missed the availability of sports programs, which he was used to in the small school. He said, "I miss the sports and things. We would always have night time practices and practices every day after school, where the teachers lived here too". He said that he really disliked the bus ride and he did not get the kind of nutritious meals which he got when he was in the small school and could go home for lunches. In response to questions about the lunches and the bus ride he said, "I cannot stand it, I hate it, that and the bus ride I cannot stand". He said that the bus trip made for a very long day and tired him out. He stated:

The early mornings are one of the worse things about going out there, it is so long you think it is not going to end. . . . People out there can go home and go on and do whatever they want, but we have to wait. . . . With people talking and carrying on you cannot get to sleep.

**Final reflections**

Sidney felt that he had not been as successful as he should have been in high school, and attributed that to doing too much socializing and not enough homework. He stated, "I could have done a bit better, because where I am doing well this year I could have done better. . . . I needed to do more homework and spend less time outside". He thought that teachers in the small school should have been a little stricter on the students and made them work harder. He said, "The teachers could have worked us harder in this school . . . out there they do not take any foolishness". He felt that he would have gotten better grades if he had done his high school courses in the small school. He said, "I would say I would have done a lot better in my courses, . . . here everybody knew what they were talking about, they were good teachers". He reported that experience with doing research papers and oral communications, which he got in the small school, was very valuable to him in high school. He stated:

It was helpful because we had to do big research papers out there. Oral communication was good because you do a lot of that out there. . . . Where there was a big class out there you were still a bit shy to get up.

He pointed out that even though his grades might have been better if he had done high school in the small school he felt that overall achievement was greater in the large school, since there was a much wider variety of experiences offered. He stated:

Where the courses are not offered here I could have achieved more in the large school, where I could get the courses I needed. . . . Where there were more people there you had to get along with people and get to know them.

He felt that the multi-grade experience could have hindered his academic development. He stated, "I would say it hindered me . . . two grades at the same time and stuff like that . . . it was confusing".

Sidney felt that the advantages of a small school were that it provided lots of extra help and there was a strong feeling of closeness and belonging. He said, "You have the help here and you know everybody. Teachers were always here and I got used to being able to get help". He felt that the advantages of the large school were its wide variety of course offerings and availability of qualified teachers to teach a diversity of courses. He stated, "You have the courses there you want, and all the teachers necessary".

Sidney stated that when he looked at students entering the large school, from the small school, for the first time they looked scared and really kept to themselves. He stated that they did not feel like outsiders after they got used to the school. He said:

The small school crowd have a scared look on their face. . . . They keep to themselves mostly, until they get to know a few people. . . . Where there are a lot from the large school they all know each other. . . . I would say they fit in. . . . If I felt like an outsider I would have gone somewhere else.

He would advise the new students to, "Try to mix in with all the people and do all of your study, do lots of study". He thought that attending the large school and making that adjustment was a good preparation for eventually leaving home and attending an even larger institution. He felt that it was an incremental preparation for leaving home, "Where it is small here and going to the high school is larger, and then going away is larger again". Sidney had never considered leaving school before graduating. He said, "I always knew that I had to go to school".

**Evan**

Evan is a shy, extremely quiet, almost introverted young man who is eighteen years of age. He is very bright, but has been an average achiever in school. He is interested in sports, and took part in almost all sports while in the small school in his home town. He took some interest in science while in school, and could often be seen around the small school taking part in science activities after school. He was well liked by teachers and fellow students. He plans to study air traffic control or attend regional college to learn a trade, which he has not decided on yet, after he graduates from high school.

**Perceptions of the small school experience**

When asked to remember his years in the small school in his community he articulated memories of closeness, and teachers who were familiar and kept a close check on students. He stated that the rules were much tighter than in the high school which he has attended for the past three years, and that the small school was highly organized. He stated:

The teachers knew the students more in this school than they do out there, you could talk to teachers more and they helped you out more. . . . There were a lot of rules like no chewing gum. . . . This school was always organized, everything you did was organized, and the class did it together.

He stated that there was a lot of group work and teacher assistance in the small school, and homework always had to be

done. He contrasted that with the difficulties of getting personal help in the large school. He stated:

Your homework always had to be done, and I remember that when we had to do assignments we worked together and teachers helped you a lot. You get help out there but not as much because the teacher has to tend to everyone. . . . Here you could get a lot of help to study for tests and things.

Evan had been heavily involved in the sports program and the rocket club in the small school. He stated:

One of the good points about this school was sports and things. Where it was close to home I could come for practice, and I used to always come to dinnertime sports, because I did not have anything else to do. I tried out for volleyball and basketball and all of those sports. . . . I was in the rocket club.

He found that there had been a higher level of activities, such as field trips in the small school than there were in the large school. He said, "I liked the activities. We used to go on trips during the year and we would always be going for sports and things. Out there we may go on one trip a year".

Evan had spent most of his years in the small school in multi-grade classrooms. He found the multi-grade classroom confusing sometimes, but did not find it to be any particular problem for him. He did express a concern that he felt that the multi-grade classroom must have been a difficult situation for the teachers. He stated:

I would say it was pretty hard for teachers because they had to teach two classes at the same time. It was good because we had such small groups, but we would be working on something and over there the teacher would be teaching another class.

In spite of the fact that Even disliked the tightness of the rules in the small school he found the closeness to be good, and the years he spent there to have been a pleasant experience. He said:

I disliked the rules like no chewing gum and changing your shoes, little rules. . . . Mostly pleasant because it is a good school. I like it out there but here we were all together and where it was so small everyone knew everyone and got along well.

He also noted that students were more closely checked on in the small school than they were in the large school. He said, "You were kept up on more. A lot of people take days off, and out in that school they do not care about that, they do not check up much." He felt that while he was in the small school he had been a quiet and good student, who kept up on his homework. He reflected that he did not keep up on his homework as well in the large school. He said:

I was pretty quiet when I was in school. . . . I was probably classed as a good student . . . I used to have all honours here and most of the time I had my homework done. Now I do not keep up on my work as much . . . there are a lot of times that I do not do my homework.

He contrasted the fact that the teachers in the small school checked students' homework closely and demanded that it be done, with the practice in large school, where homework was rarely looked at by the teachers. He stated:

In here if you did not have your homework done you would get a lecture or have to write lines, but out there they do not look at your homework. . . . That was one of the good things about this school, it kept you on your toes. . . . It would be better if they did that out there.



### **Anticipation of the large school experience**

The sense of adventure of travelling on a school bus to a large school in another community was appealing to students in the small school. Evan stated that when he graduated from the small school he had been excited about going to the large high school outside of his community. He had looked forward to meeting a lot of different people and he had expected that facilities and equipment would be better in the large school. When asked if he had looked forward to attending the large school he said:

Yes, because it was a bigger school and you hear about all the activities they do out there, . . . I thought that where they had a bigger gym and things that would be better.

The social aspects of the large school proved to be a little more difficult to deal with than he had expected. He stated, "when you got out there it changed, because there were all different groups, with one group here and another group there, like that." He had been disappointed that the facilities and equipment were not as accessible as they had been in the small school. He stated:

You do not get down in the gym as much because there are only a few of us for dinner and there are not that many people to go down to the gym. I heard about all the computers they had out there . . . but you are not allowed to play games on them.

Evan had heard stories that the work was more difficult in the large school and that more study would be required to do well. He said, "They used to say it was hard work. . . . You had to study more and some teachers were a lot stricter

than others." He also heard stories about the mischief which students got into in the large school, and information on individual teachers. He said:

They used to get in a lot of mischief and things out there, and that almost encouraged you to go out there to see what they were doing. . . . I remember he told me that one guy had a birthday and they wanted to do something to him for his birthday so they took him in the bathroom and put his head in the toilet and flushed it.

He noted that there were not as many clubs offered in the large school as had been in the small school. He stated, "There are not many clubs out there, they had a chess club, but then you had to get rides."

When Evan graduated from grade nine he was confident that he could handle the work in high school. When asked if he felt, at that time, that he could handle the high school work he replied:

Yes I did, to tell the truth. The work here was challenging but you did not need much studying to get through. I do not know about the rest of the students but I did not do much studying. I figured that when I got out there it would be more challenging. I figured it would be just as easy as this but I was surprised when I got out there. . . . I was pretty confident during the first while and I slacked off, and my marks dropped. I was pretty sure I would pass easily.

Evan had expected that people from other communities would give him a difficult time in the large school, but found that not to have been the case when he got there. He said:

I figured I would be picked on a lot and people would be saying things to me, just people with bad attitudes towards me. . . . the first year out

there ~~we~~ used to hang around together in groups but the groups were not like that, if anyone came along you always talked to them and things. . . . You had been around your friends all your life and you cannot just throw them away.

If he had been given a choice when he was in grade nine he would have chosen to attend the large school, but felt that he would have attained better grades if he remained in the small school. He said, "I like it out there because meeting people is a good experience, but academically I guess I would rather stay here".

#### *Impressions of the large school*

On entering the large school for the first time Evan was awed by the size of the building and the number of students. He found it very difficult to find his way around. He contrasted it with the small size and small number of students in the small school he had come from. He stated:

The school was humongous compared to this one and as soon as you went in all you saw was students everywhere. . . . I had a bit of trouble finding my classes the first day. Here there were only a few classes and you knew them, but out there the classes all have numbers over the doors and you have to go looking up this hall and down another hall. . . . I thought it was pretty big when I was here, but out there the halls are jammed, and I suppose there are even bigger schools than that. Classes are only half full here, but out there every class is filled up.

He noticed a difference in teacher attitude from what he had been used to in the small school. They did not seem to have the same focus on students, and often did not remember his name. He said he noticed:

The attitude the teachers had . . . it was not really a bad attitude. I guess they were not as focused on the students as much as in here. In here they would look after the students and make sure every student was doing his work, but out there it took them a long time to get to know your name, and to get to know you and to help you out.

Evan found that he had to study a lot more than he was used to in the small school and his grades still took a big drop. He stated that he did not do nearly as well as he had expected of himself in his first year of high school. He pointed out that his language grades were an exception, since they had remained the same as in the small school. He pointed out that they have improved since his first year. He stated:

When I went out there first my marks dropped a lot, like down in the fifties. The next year they were up to the sixties, and they are up to the seventies now this year. . . . My marks dropped down to the high fifties, except my language. . . . I expected that I would at least get seventies. . . . I expected them to drop a bit, but the bottom fell right out.

Even though his grades dropped in his first year of high school Evan still feels that he had been well prepared for high school. He stated that he had learned good study habits in the small school due to teacher attention. He stated:

The teachers here taught you study habits and things, and keeping you up on your homework helped a lot. If we were out there from grade kindergarten I would say I would have failed, because my study habits would not have been as good.

In his first year of high school he felt that he knew as much or more than those students in his classes who were from the

large school system. He had the advantage of having been able to move ahead in some subject areas, due to having been in a small class, so found himself ahead of most students in his classes. He said:

I think we knew more. . . . Towards our math, where it was so small we could work fast and they had a lot of students in their class, so we ended up learning things ahead, we did extra study for grade ten. . . . In the sciences like biology, things like myosis, they barely remembered from grade nine, but where we had spent so much time on it we knew it well. I always found language easy but with grammar and things the teacher we had in here always taught us until we knew the topic . . . he would not go on until we knew what we were at.

He stated that those students from the large school system seemed more used to changing teachers and large classes. Due to that, he felt that the students from the large school system could maintain the same level of grades as they were used to, while the students from the small school had to make a big adjustment. He stated:

They used to rotate teachers and every year they would have different teachers, and they were always in big classes, where we always had small classes here. I guess the way their academics were they would stay at the same level, but where we were high here [received good grades in the small school] we went out there and our grades dropped a bit, so I guess they were more prepared for the high school than we were. . . . We had to adjust to not having as much help from the teachers.

He felt that the students from the large school system might have surveyed a broader range of subject areas than he had, but lacked his in depth knowledge of some subject areas. He said, "There were some areas in the studies that they focused

on more than we did, but overall they had more of a brief overview of everything where we focused on main subjects."

### **Socialization**

When asked if it was easy to make the social adjustment from the small school to the large school, Evan replied:

First it was not because I was nervous and I did not know anyone out there, but this year is my best year because I know most of the people in my grad class. I get along well, and I know most of the teachers now, and I can talk to the teachers to ask for help and things.

He said, "People from here who were already out there knew people out there and they introduced you." He stated that the large high school did whatever it could to make new students feel welcomed. He found that the teachers were friendly and tried to help students to fit in. He thought that they had done as much as they could. He said:

I do not know about first when we went there, but for the people who stayed for lunch they would have a free lunch sometimes and that was good. . . . The teachers were good like that, and in class they would ask you questions to try to get you noticed in class, and when they made groups they would put you with people from other communities. . . . I do not think they could have done any more because it is such a big school.

Evan did not detect any academic discrimination, but when any mischief was done the students who had come from the small school were the first to be called to the office for questioning. He noted that the students who came from the small school did get involved in a lot of mischief. When asked if he had detected any discrimination he stated:

Not towards marks, but if any trouble is caused during school the first people to be called to the office are from our community. . . . I used to hear stories about all the mischief the students from our town got into and that some of the teachers had bad attitudes towards people from our town because of all the things they used to do.

He attributed the students' tendency to get into mischief to the hour which they spent in the school each day with little to do. He stated:

It was mostly because dinner times they were in the school and there was nothing to do. . . . If you put anyone in a room and left them there for a hour with nothing to do, no matter where they were from I guess they would get into mischief.

Evan stated that he has gone to more social events, such as dances, in the large school in the past two years and that the large school has offered him more opportunities to develop social skills than he could have gotten in the small school. He stated:

In grade ten I never used to go out to the large community and in grade eleven I started to go out on Friday for a dance or party, and now I hitch a ride out there with someone on any weekend to find a party. . . . Every couple of weekends I might go out there.

#### **Extra-curriculars and busing**

For a person who had been highly interested in extra-curricular activities in the small school, the difficulties of getting involved in them in the large school were a disappointment to Evan. In the large school he did not get involved in any extra-curricular activities, since busing presented a problem for him staying after school. He stated

that plenty of activities had been offered and if it had not been for the transportation problem he would have gotten involved. He said:

I do not think I ever joined anything out there. . . . Transportation was the big problem, because where dad worked he used to have to go to work and I could not get him to come and pick me up. I would have to get rides with other students and I guess I did not feel comfortable getting rides with them. If I lived close to the school and I could walk there I would try out for every team for sports, because there were good activities. They had a lot of groups out there like different clubs and things, a lot of activities. There were always sports and things going on in the school.

Evan stated that he had found the bus trip each day to be tiring, but not a problem for him. He used the time to get some extra study done. He stated:

Well I get up in the morning and I feel energetic, but as soon as I get on the bus I feel tired. . . . The bus is good because you have the ride out to get some extra studies done. . . . The first year we used to be cramped up in the seats but it is good now.

### **Final reflections**

Overall, Evan felt that he had done fairly well in high school since his grades had been steadily climbing since his first year. He stated that after his first year in high school he learned that he had to study harder and he gained confidence in talking to people. He said:

I had to study more, a lot more. . . . I still did not study as much as I should have. This year my study habits are much better. Out there you would have free periods and you would just go out in the halls and things, just studies had to improve more I guess.



He felt that the small school had given him the study habits to be able to do well in the high school, and the teachers in the small school gave students a push in that they expected their students to do well. When asked if the small school experience had been valuable to him he stated:

Yes, because the teachers helped you a lot and they got study habits into you, and developing those study habits has helped a lot when we moved out there. What the teachers expected of you encouraged you to try harder when you got out there.

Evan thought that he could have done much better, academically, in the small school if he could have done high school there, due to the closer feeling and availability of help. If he could have been given a choice of where to attend high school he would have chosen the small school for academics and the large school for social skills. He admitted that the large school did offer a wider selection of courses than the small school possibly could, and he felt that was a strength of the large school. He stated:

I think I would have gotten more help and if the rules stayed the same and there were the same teachers I would have done better here. . . . and it is only a walk from the school so you could stay behind after school to get help. Out there the teachers say you could stay behind after school and get some help, but I have to catch a bus. . . . I like it in the large school but I liked it here too. . . . The social life and meeting new people were better in the large school, but if I had stayed here my grades would have been better. I guess in the long run it would have been better to stay here, but for meeting people and getting to know people it is better in the large school. . . . Also the number of courses they had out there, they had power mechanics and things so they teach more than just the academics.

He stated that if he could have stayed in the small school for his high school years his parents could have been more involved with the school, and that would have helped him. He said, "Being close to home so your parents could get involved more with school would help." He contended that not having experienced large classes in the small school might have been a disadvantage for students who came from there. He felt that the experience of this adjustment to the large school would prove to be helpful to him in making further adjustments in the future. He said:

I never had the experience of learning how to cope with a large class. . . . Where we were in a small school and moved to a large school we got the experience of getting used to a large class, but the people from the large school were always in large classes and if they move to somewhere where there are larger classes it will hit them hard.

Evan stated the advantages of the small school as that it had a close family feeling, readily available help, and that the teachers kept a close check on students' work. He said:

Going to school in a small school you get help from the teachers, a lot of help. Teachers are always checking on you making sure you have your work done and you always know every one in the school. You are all together like one family helping each other out and things.

He felt that the large school had the advantage of offering more courses, provided a wider variety of personal experiences, and pushed people to become more independent. He stated:

The courses they offer, you learn to mix in with students better and how to approach a person and talk to them . . . more independence. In the small school you are more dependent on the teacher to help you a lot, but out there you have to learn to be dependent on yourself.

He also stated a belief that seeing so many different types of people could give a person inspiration to aspire to more things in life than what they were normally used to. He said:

You hear students talking about what they are going to do after they finish school and here almost everyone has the same attitude about what they are going to do when they finish school, but you see what all those other people are going to do and you compare yourself to them and it makes you look at what you are going to do. It helps you a lot.

Evan felt that students could achieve more in the large school, because of the diversity of learning opportunities offered there. He stated:

I think you could achieve more in a large school because all the things that are offered would help you a lot. We have no one from our school who does music. There are students out there who play piano and things and win awards and everything. . . . It would have been a big help if there were instruments here so students could learn things. The people out there have probably been playing and practicing instruments ever since they started school. . . . I do not know a thing about an instrument.

In the large school Evan missed the sports activities and field trips which he had been used to in the small school. He said:

I miss sports a lot, because I would always be in sports a lot, but out there I did not do a bit of sports. The only thing that kept me in half decent shape here was sports and the only sports I get now when I go up to play basketball at the boys and

girls club. I missed the trips that we used to go on, I missed that a lot. I remember one trip for science when we went up on the highway looking at the rocks and things. We have done some similar trips out there, but I still miss the activities here.

Evan would advise students in the small school to work hard so that they will be able to compete with students in the large school when they get there. He would also advise them to study hard and not to be shy to speak up in class and approach new people when they get to the large school. He said:

Study more, definitely pick up your study habits a lot. Get in with the rest of the crowd in the school and get to know people and start talking. Do not be shy during class. When I was first there if the teacher asked a question I would never answer it . . . because the class was so big and I was afraid that if I said something wrong they would laugh. Work harder during sports because I think the large community has better sports teams than our community. Their players are better than most players from our community, but we still have good teams where we practiced in a small gym and we have better control over the ball. Get involved with whatever you can.

Evan had never thought of leaving school before graduating. He asserted, "I was always determined to finish school".

**Eileen**

Eileen is eighteen years of age and lived her early years in the large community being studied, then moved to the small community at the age of five, where she did her primary to junior high schooling. She is a rather quiet and easy going person, but has a tendency to become defensive at times. She can be quite outspoken when she feels unjustly treated. She is very socially active and is well liked by classmates and teachers. She was a good student who received high average grades in the small school. She plans to study legal office assistance at regional college after graduation from high school.

**Perceptions of the small school experience**

When asked to remember her life in the small school Eileen readily stated that she had really enjoyed her life there, and that she felt that it was much better than the large school which she is presently attending. She contended that in the small school the teachers were concerned for each individual and gave them a lot of individual attention. She contrasted that with the teachers' attitudes in the large school. She stated:

I liked going to this school, I would much rather be here than out at the large school. . . . Here you used to get a lot more attention from the teacher, whereas out there the classes are bigger and the teachers really do not care if you get it or not. They just teach it and that is it, . . . some of them, not all of them, whereas here the

teacher would go over it and go over it until you did know it. . . . There was not as many students and they had a lot more time to spend with each student.

She had been very involved in after school activities, such as sports, science clubs, and choir in the small school. She said:

I did a lot more in here in track and field and volleyball, but out there I had a lot of problems getting rides in and out after school. . . . I was in the astronomy club and the choir.

She liked the fact that there was less moving around in the small school and when she got in class she was settled. She said:

There is not as much moving around in here, most of the time you are in one class, whereas out there you are rushing around from class to class and to your locker getting books. First out there I did not know where in the world to go, because there was so much out there, whereas here I knew where everything was.

Eileen had spent most of her kindergarten to grade nine years in multi-grade classrooms, in the small school. When asked what she thought of the multi-grade classes she said, "Sometimes it would be difficult, where the teacher was trying to teach two grades at once, and you would get mixed up. . . . I got a little confused at times." She felt that integrating programs to accommodate the two grades in the class was not a problem for her, and it was better than having two separate programs going on in the class at the same time. She stated:

That was no problem, I thought it was better if the classes were combined. At least everybody was

doing the same thing instead of two different things. . . . I did not really notice it because you just go through it.

She felt that the teacher control of the timetable and no change of teacher during the day made classes in the small school a little more monotonous than in the large school. She stated, "Sometimes we would have two periods of something in a row, or have the same teacher for the whole day instead of getting a change."

Eileen considered herself to have been a good student in the small school, who kept up on her work and received good grades. She reflected that her work has fallen back and her grades have dropped since she has been in high school. She said:

. . . When I went to this school I did a lot more studying than in the high school. . . . I thought I was getting good marks.

She stated that she was forced to do her homework in the small school, but in the large school she is left much more on her own. She also remembered that she had been constantly reminded of work to be completed while in the small school, which is not done in the large school. She stated:

Teachers always reminded you to do this or that, whereas out there they set it and then nothing else is said about it until time to have it done, and with homework if it is done it is done, and if it is not it is not. It had nothing to do with them, there was nothing coming out of their pay cheques. The way they saw it was, if you were not going to do the work on your own they were not going to have anything to do with you.

### Anticipation of the large school experience

When she was in her last year at the small school Eileen looked forward to attending the large school outside of her community in the following year. She had heard stories from friends who had told her that a person could get away with skipping classes and not doing work in the large school. She said:

I could not wait to leave. . . . You would hear all those stories about how easy you would get it and all the things you would get off with. . . . Things like if you did not want to go to class the teachers were not going to harass you and say things like get to class, or chase you around to see where you were. . . . If you did not want to do your work, fine, they did not care, if you did not do it, you did not do it. They said it was a lot easier, you could get away with practically murder out there, and all those things. . . . I could not wait to get out there.

She heard that the work was not very difficult, except for a few of the most difficult courses. She discovered that those stories were mostly exaggerated, and in the large school she could not get away with nearly as much as she had been told. She stated:

Mostly I heard that a lot of the courses were easy except for a few courses like biology and chemistry. . . . You could grasp them with just what was done in class, there was not much studying to it, except for the hard courses. Mostly the stories just came from one person, so it was what one person did or got away with, and that was just one individual. . . . Most people would get caught when they did something wrong and there were only a few who would not. At the first part of the year they were letting us off with a lot because we did not know the rules, but later in the year they started cracking down.



She expected that the change of school would be very positive, especially in that she would get a choice of courses. She did like being able to choose courses which she was interested in. She stated:

I thought mostly it would be a change because where I had been in this school for ten years I wanted to get a change and see some different faces. I could choose courses rather than having to do a certain set number of courses. . . . With the courses it was a lot better, because if you had an interest in computers they were offering computer courses that you could do, and if you did not like that course you could change to something else.

On leaving the small school Eileen felt very confident in her preparation for high school. She expected to be able to achieve at the same level, academically, as she had been accustomed to in the small school, without doing any more work. On entering the large school she found that she could handle most courses as she expected, except for math, where her marks really dropped. She said:

From what people said when I went out there I was expecting to fly through getting the same marks as I always got here, without much work to it. I wanted to do the harder courses like biology and physics and things like that, and I knew that there was going to be a lot of study and extra work that I would have to put into it. . . . I took chemistry for a month and I had to drop it, I could not handle it. I always considered myself a good student in math when I was here, and I failed math in my first year out there.

She did not expect any problems with fitting in socially since she had many relatives and friends in the large school. She stated:

I lived there before I came to school here, I had lots of relatives out there, and when I was going

to school here I spent lots of time out there, so I knew a lot of people out there. . . . I knew the people who I was going to be going to school with. . . . I knew most of them anyway.

### **Impressions of the large school**

For many students from the small school the first few weeks in the large school were difficult, but Eileen felt very good about her first weeks in that school, since she was getting to do courses of her choice and spend time with old friends. She said:

The first day I loved it out there because I knew a lot of people and I was getting to spend a lot of time with friends I did not get to see a lot. . . . I could have my choice of picking my own courses and doing what I wanted to do, instead of what other people told me to do.

Her first impressions of the large school were of:

The size of the school and the number of teachers. They have four different labs, a music room, and a french room, and almost a room for every different thing. There were a lot of different teachers out there and it was harder to remember who was doing what, where you are supposed to go, and what classrooms you are supposed to be in, and when.

When asked what adjustments she remembered having to make in her first year at the large school Eileen replied, "Getting up six o'clock every morning to get on the bus. . . . It was a major problem because I used to keep sleeping in. The first day of school I missed the bus." She continued to say that an even bigger adjustment which she had to make was to different teaching styles and expectations. She stated:

It is sort of different out there because where we spent nine or ten years here we were used to it ,

but out there we had to get used to a different style of teaching. . . . I never got the marks that I was used to getting in the small school. When it came to things we had to learn . . . the way they used to teach things was hard to get used to. We were used to a certain way of teaching all the time but out there we had three or four different math teachers and they each had their own style of teaching.

She found that a lot more work had to be done on her own in the large school, and that it was more difficult to get good grades. She said this was:

Basically because you get a lot more attention here and if a person in class does not get it the teacher will go over it again, but out there if you do not get it after they go over it so many times it is up to you to learn it on your own, and then they will go on to something else and you will start to fall behind, because you do not know what you are doing. . . . I had to do a lot more work at home, like studying, because you cannot just listen in class and then know it. You have to read through the book and read your notes on your own. A lot of the courses I took in first year were hard and in order to pass a test you cannot study the night before, like I used to do here. You had to go over it so many times every night in order to pass out there.

In her first year her grades dropped considerably and she failed to complete two courses. She stated:

In the first year I lost my math credits and my french credits, but of the courses that I passed I did not get a grade below sixty five. . . . I expected my marks to be higher because when I went here I used to get no less than seventies, but out there teachers grade a lot harder and it was a struggle to get good marks.

Even though she had a difficult first year Eileen still felt that she had been well prepared for high school. She felt that she had more knowledge than her classmates from the large school system in the first year, because she had done

more in depth study in the small school. She said, "Actually I thought that we knew a lot more than they did. . . . When it came to things like science and social studies and things like that they did not have a clue." She pointed out that she felt that the students who came from the large school system were more adept at cramming for examinations and then forgetting the material learned. She said:

With them they would have it in their heads long enough for the test to come and then they would forget it all, whereas we went over and over it so many times in the small school that it stuck.

She stated that students from the small school were equal to students from the large school system in practically all areas. She said, "Everything that they could do most of us could do." She felt that students from the small school were superior in sports, especially, "volleyball, our boys volleyball team." She stated, "besides sports we were basically the same." She contended that one advantage which the students from the large school system had was that they were more used to the school, the teachers, and the size of the classes. She said, "They were used to the school itself and they were used to the teachers and their way of teaching, where they had them in junior high school." She found the size of the classes to be intimidating and never adjusted to speaking out in class. She said:

Here you were used to if you had a question you asked, or put up your hand, but out there you were almost afraid to put up your hand and ask with everybody listening. . . . I am still like that in my literature classes. It is a discussion class

but I am just sitting there listening to everybody else arguing or discussing, and I am not going to open my mouth unless I am asked . . . I do not want to put my two cents worth in.

### **Socialization**

Eileen felt that a point had been made by the staff of the large school to make the new students in the school feel welcomed. She stated that the staff made a special effort to speak to them and make them feel comfortable. She said:

The principal used to come up and start to talk to us and start a conversation, and even the janitors used to come up and talk to us, to start up a conversation and make us feel at home. . . . Whatever they could do, they did.

She felt that she had fitted in very well socially and found no social segregation on the basis of home community. In fact, she reported that the students in the large school made a special effort to socialize with her. She said, "It was the other way around, where we were from another town they wanted to hang around with us, and if they had something to do they wanted us included." She found that she had assimilated into the life of the large school after a very short adjustment period. She said:

At the first of the year most of the people from our community stuck together, but as the year went on they would each go with their own groups. . . . It was easier to go on your own.

Eileen felt no discrimination on the basis of academics, and stated, "With marks and things a lot of teachers did mark hard, but it was not because of where we were from, they

marked for us the same way as they marked for everybody." She noticed, however, that there was quick blaming of boys from the small school when mischief was done. She stated that this might have been justified sometimes, but not always. She stated:

. . . If something happened the boys from our community would get blamed for it first, before they would even think about it. If one little thing went wrong they would come to us, we would get blamed first. . . . A lot of times people from our community did cause trouble, but after a while it all chilled down, and even if the littlest thing happened our community would get blamed for it, even though we may not have done it. . . . Where they were used to us doing it so many times we would just get the blame put on us.

She suggested that the long lunch hour with little to do could have contributed to the students from the small school often being involved in mischief. She said, "The dinner hours are longer and everybody is finished eating their dinner, so they are just walking around the school waiting for one o'clock to come to go back to class."

#### **Extra-curriculars and busing**

Eileen did not take part in any extra-curricular activities in the large school, mainly due to the difficulties of finding transportation after school. She did work in the canteen during lunch hours. She said:

. . . I worked in the canteen but nothing else. . . . Mostly because a lot of the activities were held after school and there was a problem getting rides . . . you had to find your own way. . . . I would have really liked to if it was not so much trouble getting rides back and forth.

Since she had not had a band program in the small school Eileen did not have the background to get involved in the band program in the large school. She regretted that, and would have liked to have been able to take part in the school band. She said, "A lot of them out there had a musical background. . . . there were a lot of people who would have liked to have been in the band if they knew how to play an instrument." She missed the classes in art and music which she had in the small school. In the large school the music and art facilities were restricted to those students who were taking those programs and she missed having ready access to those facilities for recreational purposes, as she had been used to in the small school. She stated:

Here we used to have music classes and art classes, and things like that, whereas out there if you wanted anything to do with music you had to join the band, or if you wanted to use any of the art things or the computers you had to be taking computer or art classes. You just could not go over to the art room or to the computers and use it, you had to be in one of the classes, whereas here you could just go on and use things if you wanted to. . . . If you wanted to go down to the music or art room you had to get permission for some special reason.

Eileen pointed out that the bus and lunches were a problem for many people from the small school. She had not had many problems with lunches due to often going to relative's homes. She said, "It was not so bad for me because I could go up to my grand-parents' and I did not have to eat sandwiches." However, she had found the bus to be very difficult. She stated:

It was hard getting up that hour in the morning, having to travel out there and eating sandwiches every day, and then coming back on the bus. There is that much racket you cannot get to sleep so, you are dragged out in school all day, where you have been up so early in the morning.

She stated that the early start and the noise level on the bus were very difficult to deal with. It had a tendency to make her feel very tired and she never adapted to it. When asked if she thought that affected her academic performance she stated:

Yes, because you have to get up at six o'clock every morning to get ready to go to school and you cannot sleep on the bus because there is too much racket. You are in school all day tired. Some teachers are boring, so if you are trying to pay attention and you are so tired you are almost falling asleep, and it is hard to pay attention. You are walking around like a zombie, not knowing if you are coming or going. . . . You want to go to bed rather than studying. . . . I am still not used to it after three years.

#### **Final reflections**

The quality of school experience which a student has had can be reflected in the academic success of the student.

Eileen felt that she had been fairly successful in high school, although she would have liked to have done better.

She said:

Not as well as I would have liked to have done, not as well as I thought I would do first when I went out there, but if had a chance I would have studied harder, if I had my time back. . . . In most things I feel that I have been successful, in some I should have worked harder.

She stated that the small school had helped her to be successful by instilling good study habits and skills in her.



She had learned skills such as methods of remembering in the small school. She felt that the accessibility of computers in the small school had been a big help to her success in high school. She said:

When we were here some teachers gave you certain ways to remember things and certain study habits that would always be with you and you could use in high school, like if you do not understand something to break it down into parts so that you could understand it. . . . When I was here in grade nine we got the computers and I took a great interest in them, so every year I have been taking computer courses, and when I go to university what I study is going to be computer based.

Eileen would advise new students to the large school, from the small school, not to believe half that they hear about the large school, because they will not get away with as much as others might make them think. She would also encourage them to work hard in their courses and to get involved in as much of the life of the large school as they can. She would advise:

Do not believe everything you are told about the school, you will not get away with half of the things that they say you will. You will get suspended a lot easier out there than you would in here. There is a lot more work to do in your courses out there, just basically there is more studying and work, more work on your own. It is not as easy as everybody says it is. . . . If you fall behind you will not know what is going on in the next year and that will have a great effect on you, because the teachers are not going to sit down with you for hours and hours explaining it over and over again. You will have to learn it on their own or not learn it at all. . . . Get involved with the sports and whatever you want to do, do it. . . . There is almost everything offered out there that you can do. . . . if you can get the rides.

Eileen felt that the biggest problem she had in the large school was the adjustment to a different school and teachers. She said:

I think I would have done better . . . if I had the same teachers I had all the time, here. I would have been able to understand it better, understand their way of teaching it. Now in my third year I am just getting used to the way they teach each subject.

She stated that the small school experience really helped her in her high school success since most of the skills she used in high school courses could be traced back to the small school. She said, "I would say it helped quite a bit. . . . It is basically my study habits and everything I do out there I learned from this school." She reflected that the mathematics problem which she had experienced in her first year of high school was primarily due to a personality clash with the teacher she had. She said:

It was just the adjustment because I always used to do well in math. Math was my best subject until I went out there. It was just the adjustment to the teacher, and basically that I did not like the teacher. . . . It was harder to learn and understand what he was saying.

She made up for that problem by taking two math courses in her second year. She stated:

In level two I took level one and level two math at the same time. That was sort of confusing but I got it straightened out and now I find it a lot easier doing the level three math.

Eileen thought that students could achieve more, academically, in a small school, even though a large school had the advantages of offering better facilities and more

choices. She said, "I think they would achieve more in a small school than in a large one. . . . A large school may have better facilities and things to use . . . they have lots of choices." She saw the advantages of a small school as being that there was a close family feeling and students got more individual attention from the teachers. She stated:

It is easier for you to understand things, you get more individual attention from the teachers because they do not have as many people to work with, it is like one big family and everybody knows everybody, so if you do not understand what the teacher says you can go to someone else and they will help you.

She saw the advantages of the large school as, "You get more choice in courses, and they have more and better facilities to use."

Bileen had never entertained thoughts of leaving school before graduating. When asked if she had, she said:

No, not really, just sometimes when I was not doing so well in a course and no matter how much I would study it would not stick in . . . nothing coming to the point where I would want to drop out though.

She ended by stating that she would have preferred to have attended the small school all the way through her school years.

She said:

When I was here I could not wait to get out there, but now if I had my time back I would have definitely stayed here. . . . If I had a choice I would much rather be here going to school than out there. . . . I liked having a small school.

Since she could not do high school courses in the small school she is determined to get out of the large school

quickly by completing high school on time. She stated, "My last bit of high school is going to be out there, so I am going to do my best to get out of there so I do not have to go back."

### **Nelson**

Nelson is nineteen years old, and is in his fourth year of high school. He experienced severe difficulties in adjusting to life in a large school, and really disliked attending such a school. He is a very outgoing person who enjoys joking, and spends much of his time laughing. He received higher than average grades while attending the small school being studied. In the small school he had always been very active in the social life of the school, especially in planning and carrying out assemblies and talent shows. In this interview he related that he had often wished that he could have won a lottery so that he could have a high school constructed in his community, eliminating the need to attend the large school, which he has attended for the past four years. He stated:

I always said that if I ever won a lot of money, a lottery or something, I would give them the money to build a high school here. . . . I guess where there is a smaller crowd and you know everybody here . . . it is more comfortable.

He plans to attend university to study nursing when he graduates from high school.

### **Perceptions of the small school experience**

In a discussion of his memories of life in the small school Nelson related remembering that classes were very small and the atmosphere was relaxed in the small school. He stated:

Well there were really small classes. . . . Behaviour was different, in here you were allowed to joke around and carry on so much and the teacher would not get mad at you. . . . There was not as much homework.

He felt that he had been very close with the teachers in the small school, and it was more as if they had been friends, in contrast to a more formal atmosphere in the large school. He could not think of anything which he disliked about the small school, and felt that his years there had been a very pleasant experience. He said his fondest memory was:

Knowing the teachers like I did, because it seemed like they were your friends and you could talk to them. Other places you do not really know the teachers and you cannot say things to them and joke around with them like I used to do here. . . . There was nothing I did not like here.

Nelson had spent most of his kindergarten to grade nine years in multi-grade classes. He stated that the multi-grade classes were sometimes confusing, but the material got covered just the same. He felt that integration of programs to accommodate two grades in the same classroom caused no problems for him, although he thought that it could have been a problem for slower students. He stated, "There was a lot of confusion in the class and you did not know really what to do. . . ." In reference to the integration of programs he said that for some people, "it might have caused some problems."

Nelson took part in many extra-curricular activities, including chess club and choir. He said:

When I was in the younger grades I took part a lot, but in junior high I did not have as much involvement in sports. I was involved with the science club, the chess club and the choir.

When asked what kind of student he thought he had been in the small school he said, "I was a good student and kept up on my homework." When asked if he had maintained his academic performance in the large school he replied, "No, I dropped back on my marks, I had my homework done most of the time, but a lot of times I did not do things like I did here." He attributed that to losing interest in school because he did not want to be in the large school. He stated:

There was a big difference in grade ten. . . . I never had any interest in it, I guess I always wanted to be here and when I left here I lost all interest in it. Even the orientation [in the spring of his grade nine year] day when we went out there I knew I was not going to like it out there.

#### **Anticipation of the large school experience**

Most students in their last year in the small school anticipated that attending a large school in another community would be a very enjoyable experience. Like his classmates, Nelson looked forward to attending the large school, during his last year in the small school, but with some anxiety, because he had been told that he would feel lost, and probably would not like it. He said:

Oh yes, people could not wait to get out of here. . . . My brother told me that I would not like it out there, that he could not stand it, and that I would be lost and not like it. Some people liked it but a lot of people in grade ten did not like it either.

He had heard stories that the work was difficult in the large school. He said, "I heard that courses were a lot harder out there. One girl told me that I would not believe the french course, but I did not find it any different." He really did not think that he would find anything better in the large school. He stated, "There was nothing I could say I thought would be better out there."

Nelson felt confident that he was well prepared for high school and he had no fear of academic courses. When asked if he had felt confident of his ability to handle the academics in the large school he stated, "Yes, because when I first went out there I signed up for physics and everything. I thought I could handle it. . . . I thought I was going to do well." He did have some fear that he would find social adjustment difficult and that he might not fit in. He said:

First I did, because when I was here there was mostly all girls in my class, there were only a few boys and I knew that some of them were going to different schools, or would be in different classes, so I was worried about who was going to be in class with me.

If he had been given the opportunity while in grade nine he would have chosen to remain in the small school to complete his high school education. His desire to be in the small school caused him to avoid going to classes in the large school in his first year. He said:

It was a lot different than out at the high school. When I went out there I did not want to be out there and I used to take a lot of classes off, but when I was here it never used to come to me to skip off. . . . I do not know why . . . I did not mind



going to school here. When I first went out there I did not like it so that is why I always wanted to skip off, and I found that with a lot of people who went out there from here, always skipping off.

He attributed his feelings of not wanting to be in the large school to the large classes and impersonality of the school.

He stated:

It was the bigger classes, so many people around you in class and you got uncomfortable. I think that had a lot to do with it. . . . You did not know everyone, while here you knew every soul.

### **Impressions of the large school**

Nelson's first impression of the large school was that it was very large, that he was lost, and that he did not belong there. He felt that there was total chaos around him because he could make no sense of where everyone was rushing to all around him. He stated:

I was lost, like I did not belong there. I did not know anyone. There was chaos with everyone going everywhere. It seemed that no one knew what they were doing, and we were just standing up watching everyone go by.

He found that the large numbers of students in classes, and the fact that they were unfamiliar to him made him very uncomfortable.

Here there was twenty in our class and out there, there was thirty five or forty. Out there you looked across and you did not know who that person next to you was. . . . When you went to a different class there were different people again. . . . You never did get used to the people out there.

He found it very uncomfortable that the classes were much more formal than in the small school and students could not

joke and laugh. This was a very difficult adjustment for him and he found classes to be very long. He stated:

In one of the first classes I was in the teacher came up to me and got right off the head and drove me out. I said to him when he drove me out that he would find a difference with a lot of us because in the small school we were used to so much carrying on. That was the first big thing that I noticed, that we were not allowed to carry on. . . . That was a negative thing because you are not comfortable where you are, you have to be very quiet and do your work, and that is it. . . . It did not feel like home. . . . I was always up tight. . . . The classes seemed so long because in here when you got your work done ybu could talk to the person next to you.

Even though the workload was about the same as in the small school Nelson did not keep up on his work, and he began to skip classes. He reported that there was a little more homework to be done in the large school. He said:

I think the workload was about the same, it was not much harder and it was not much easier. . . . I figured that when I went to high school there would be so much homework that I would not be able to keep up with it, but it was no different than it was here. . . . There was a bit more homework, not a lot, but you did have to work more when you were home.

In his first year in the large school Nelson's grades dropped severely from those he had been used to in the small school, especially mathematics. He did not do nearly as well as he had expected to. He stated, "The first year I just barely made it. . . . I failed math. . . . I thought I was going to do a lot better. I figured I could maybe go to advanced math." He said that his grades dropped in, "most areas besides literature. . . . A lot of it was that the

interest was gone." He attributed his problems in mathematics to problems adjusting to the teacher, who would not wait for students who were experiencing difficulty in understanding concepts. He said:

I think the biggest reason was the teacher we had out there for math, I did not find him that good. He would not explain everything out to you. Our teacher here would go over everything until you understood it and he would come down if you did not get it, but out there you would just do it, and if you did not understand it, if you wanted to I guess you could stay after school, but he would not take the time in class to do it, just go on to the next section and you were left behind.

In spite of his poor academic performance in his first year in the large school, Nelson thought that the small school had prepared him very well for high school. He did not think that any school could have done any better. He said, "I do not see how this school could have done any differently, it did a good job. There was no other way to prepare us any more." He stated that the major part of the difficulties which he experienced in his first year in the large school stemmed from the fact that he had a medical problem, which caused him to miss a lot of school. He could not seem to get any work sent home so he fell hopelessly behind in his courses and could not make it up. He stated:

I never spent much time in school. In grade ten I had a lot of surgery and when I came back I was lost. They never ever sent home any work. I called them, but no way would they send home any work. When I came back I was just lost, and I used to go in the classroom and it was like the first day there, I did not know what was going on. Then they used to expect me to keep up with it and there

was no way I could have, so that is why I used to skip off a lot.

Nelson felt that he knew as much as those students in his classes who came from the large school system. He stated that the students who came from the large school system were no better prepared for high school than he was. Sometimes in mathematics classes he felt that other students were ahead of him, but he felt that he was ahead of them in language and equal with them in science and social studies. He stated:

In language we were way ahead. Things they never even heard of, I knew. We had done it in grade nine. Ways of writing sentences and things that they had never even touched we knew. . . . In science and social studies I found that we were about equal. They seemed to know more in math. People used to come up with answers when he asked questions. They knew it all and we would just look at them. How did they get that answer? . . . That was only in math. . . . I felt a couple of times in math that they must have learned some things somewhere else because we never learned it for sure, and the teacher just assumed that we knew it too, and he just went on.

He felt that students from the large school system had an advantage, in that they were more familiar with the school and the teachers. He said, "They probably knew the teachers all along, from grade seven up, and knew what the teacher was like and how he taught the class."

### **Socialization**

Nelson stated that an effort had been made early in the school year to welcome the students from the small school, but after that it seemed that no one cared that they were

there. He said, "At first they did, but after it did not seem like they really cared if you were there or not." He believed that some time should have been spent helping them to get settled into the life of the school before starting to get down to work. He said, "They could have been with you and not got down to work right away, just got to know the people first." His social life continued to improve a little after the first year, but he had little interest in the social life of the large school. When asked about his social life he replied:

It has probably increased a little. . . . Last year was our grad year but I had no interest in doing any of those things. The graduation we had in grade nine meant more to me than the graduation out there. That graduation did not mean a thing to me . . . I was not excited about it.

Nelson did not detect any social discrimination on the basis of community of origin since he mixed freely with many students in the school. When asked if he saw any such discrimination he said, "It did not make any difference. There was no prejudice or anything like that." He did feel that students from the small school were often accused unfairly of causing problems in the school. He stated that he was found guilty of wrong doing once and from that time on he was suspected every time something was done in the school. He stated:

The only thing I found was that if anything ever happened, something beaten up or anything, we used to always get the blame for it. . . . I guess they figured that because there were a lot of us who stayed in for dinner, but then again there were

people from other communities who stayed in for dinner. Last year there were a lot of floods and things and the first ones they went to were us, some even got kicked out for dinner hours and they never had anything to do with it, I did not think that was fair. . . . I got in trouble once out there for doing something and ever since that other people have been doing it and the first one they will come to is me. . . . The same thing happened again the other day, they called me in the office. I can understand them thinking that if I did it once I would do it again, but still I think they should have asked around to see if they could find something out first.

He had a sense of academic discrimination in one course, but did not feel that it was a general problem. He said:

I only found one course where that might have happened. He did not like our community. He almost came out and said it one day when he said there were too many in that class. He was kind of hinting around that he did not want us there. . . . Sometimes but not very often . . . that was not a general thing.

#### **Extra-curriculars and busing**

Nelson had always been very active in the social life of the small school, especially in instigating, and performing in, talent shows and assemblies. However, he did not join any activities outside of classes in the large school. He stated:

When I was here I was always in talent shows but out there I never got involved. . . . When I saw people on the stage I used to say in my mind that was what I used to do. . . . I just did my classes.

He attributed that partially to the fact that not many of the students from the small school had gotten involved in extra-curricular activities during their first year in the large

school, but for him lack of interest in the large school was the major factor. He said:

I guess it was because other people from our community did not get involved either. The boys here used to be always into sports and on teams, but it did not seem to me that they used to do as much out there. They did not get as involved in teams until after, in grade eleven or twelve. The first year hardly anyone mixed in with school activities. . . . For me it was because I did not want to be there, even during class hours, so I had no interest in it. As soon as the bell went I wanted to go.

Nelson also felt that the busing contributed to their lack of participation in extra-curriculars. He stated:

I think the busing caused problems for a lot of people because if they wanted to get involved they had no way back and forth. A lot of parents did not have cars, or whatever, so they would not have any way. Maybe if there was a bus or some other arrangements made they would have done it.

### **Final reflections**

Nelson did not think that his high school years were as successful as they should have been. He felt that he should have done much better in his first two years. He stated that after his first year in the large school things got much worse for him, and he missed most of his second year due to skipping classes. He has since corrected that situation and has done much better. He stated:

I could have done a lot better. This year improved. This is my fourth year. . . . After grade ten it got worse because I missed a lot of school that year due to having surgery, but in grade eleven I think I only went to four weeks of school the whole year, and it kept getting worse. Any other year I was not interested but this year I

know I have to get it done or I will end up doing nothing, so this year I am getting way better marks. I have not gotten a mark lower than eighty two this year and I have gotten a lot of hundreds. I had not gotten hundreds since coming to high school, until this year . . . so I could have done a lot better.

Nelson said he missed, "getting involved a lot, like in assemblies and things. I always got involved in those kinds of things." He said that there were not as many special events done as were done in the small school. In the small school it was not uncommon to take a Friday afternoon to watch a movie, but students worked harder when working, so just as much, if not more, got done. He stated:

Not many things go on there, like for education week, here we used to do a lot of things but out there, there is just one assembly and that is it. . . . In here teachers used to sometimes go over to the drug store and pick up a movie for us to watch for the afternoon, but there was nothing like that out there. . . . We got everything done that had to be done. . . . When we were here everyone did their work and made sure that it was done, they worked harder, but out in the high school people would be sitting there doing nothing. I do not think they got half as much done. . . . Here we made time for both of it.

He stated that in the small school, "It was a lot easier and more relaxed and that is what I expected when I went out there, and when it was not I kind of gave up on it. . . . The atmosphere here was the kind that I could work in." His experiences with getting along with people and public speaking in the small school really helped him to get along in the large school. He said:

I got along with people here and when I went out there I got along with people, and that helped me a



nice bit, because if I did not I probably would not have done as well as I did. . . . The experience of planning and carrying out assemblies helped me in my grade eleven language course because there were a lot of oral presentations and I was used to getting up in front of the whole school in here. If I had just gone there and had never done an oral presentation before I probably would not have done it.

When asked if he noticed a difference between new students entering the large school from the small school and those entering from the large school system, Nelson observed that he noticed that the females entering the high school from the small school seemed to be much more mature than those entering from the large school system, while the situation was reversed for males. He said:

One thing I do notice is the students who come from the large system seem a lot smaller, like little children, and those who come from our school seem grown up. . . . Those from our community seem to act a lot more grown up . . . this seems to apply more to the girls than to the boys. . . . In our class the girls always did a lot better than we did.

He stated that he felt that he could have achieved more if he had remained in a small school for all of his school years. He conceded that the large school could have provided more opportunities for social development, but felt that was insignificant. He stated:

I could have achieved more in a small school. . . . I would have done a lot better. I would say I would have had one of the best marks in this school. I would have had honours, no doubt about it. . . . You have more chance to develop social skills out there because there are more people around you.

However, he stated that he had learned very good social skills while in the small school. He said, "When I went out there the reason why I could get along with people so well was that I learned it in this school."

Nelson listed the advantages of the small school as, "You know the teacher more, you know their methods, you know all the people and you know everything about them, classes are smaller, and the atmosphere is more relaxed." He felt that the advantages of the large school were that, "For people doing a lot of sciences there is more and better equipment, and there is a bigger choice of courses." He stated that he would gladly trade those advantages for the atmosphere of the small school. He said, "I would rather do without the choices and stick to just so many subjects, and that is it."

Nelson reported that he had felt like quitting school on a number of occasions, and if he could have found a small high school to attend in his area he would have gone there. He stated:

In grade eleven I wanted to just call out and say forget it, but I came back. I did that three or four times. . . . I knew that if I gave up that was it, there was no other smaller school to go to . . . so I decided to go on and try to get through it. . . . It was just the school atmosphere that made me feel that way.

Nelson observed that the biggest problem with the students from the small school attending the large school was that they tended to skip classes. He attributed that to the

difference in the atmosphere between the two schools. He said:

I found that there are more and more students from here who are skipping off each year . . . students you would not expect it from. . . . I think they do not like it there. . . . Three or four students who started grade ten out there this year are skipping most of their classes.

He stated that the closeness, "just was not there."

### **Ted**

Ted is eighteen years old, and he moved to the small school being studied when he was in grade eight, spending only two years in that school. He transferred from another small school which was located in the same community. He generally earned high grades while he was in the small school. He has a slightly negative attitude toward school, in that he sees it as something to be tolerated, but he does not like it much. He is sociable and outgoing, and is well liked by all who know him, although at times he can be very defensive when talking to teachers. He comes from a troubled family background, but he is generally very pleasant. He plans to become an air traffic controller after he graduates from high school.

#### **Perceptions of the small school experience**

When asked to remember his years in the small schools Ted related memories of closeness, with students who all knew each other and teachers who spent a lot of time with students. He stated that, "as school goes", he had pleasant memories of his years in the small schools. He said:

It was pretty good, I did not have to get up in the mornings early. It was as good a place as any to be. I do not generally love school. . . . I did not have any problems with it. . . . You knew everyone because you grew up with them all, and you were not as nervous. . . . You knew the teachers better and could talk to the teachers in the classroom.

He stated that he received better grades in the small school and that the atmosphere was better for working. He stated:

I used to get better marks in the small school, especially in math, we had a good teacher, and since I went out there my marks dropped down a lot. . . . In math you would get it understood before you moved on. . . . I found it, working wise, better here.

Ted had spent most of his early school years in multi-grade classrooms, and he felt that the multi-grade class was not much different from the single-grade class, except that it may have provided more catch up time while the teacher was taken by the other grade. He said:

It is not much different really because . . . if you miss a bit of work you may have to make it up from last class, but you are not missing anything really because the teacher might be talking to the other grade, which would give you time to catch up.

He stated that it made no difference if he was doing a program from ahead or below his grade level because he simply did what the teacher expected him to do. When asked if he found it difficult, when programs were integrated for the multi-grade classroom, to do a program one year ahead of his grade level, he responded:

No, we learned it. It is no different than grade ten doing grade twelve courses and we did that out in the large school. . . . You learn on your own with the teacher teaching you. . . . It was no big deal if you could do a grade eleven course in grade ten you could do a grade eight course in grade seven.

Ted found the availability of after school activities to be very good in the small school and took part in many sports activities and some other clubs. He stated, "I took part in

sports, but I do not think I took part in any committees or clubs. . . . I was in a guitar club." He had fond memories of, "Staying after school to play sports, or something like that, you did not have to worry about getting home." He felt that he was a social person and preferred to have more people around him than were found in the small school. He said, "I like being around a lot of people but here there was only about fifteen people in my class."

#### **Anticipation of the large school experience**

When asked if, when he was in grade nine, he really looked forward to attending the large school during the following year, Ted said, "Yes, but at first I was going to go to the other school in our community, but I decided to go out there." He expected that the social life would be much better in the large school. He had heard stories about the social life and many amusing anecdotes about the antics of the students in the large school. He stated:

Mainly they used to tell me about what it was like on Friday and Saturday nights. . . . If someone got in trouble they used to tell about that and talk about the teachers, and poke fun of this fellow or that one. . . . I was looking for the private [social] life, you know.

He had also heard that the work was more difficult and the teachers were stricter in the large school, but reported that he had not found that personally. He stated:

They said that the teachers were stricter out there, but I find it the other way around. They do not let you get away with things, but they are not

as picky as they are in the small schools. . . . They said that but I do not think it is any harder really, I just think you were moving up from junior high to high school and there was a lot more work in high school, no matter where you were.

Ted felt very confident that he would be able to cope with the courses in the large school, and since he had many friends in the large community he felt that he would fit in well socially. He stated:

I knew that school is school and it is no different wherever you are. We got taught just as much in our school as they got taught out there. Whatever they knew out there I knew too. . . . I knew that what I put into it was what I would get out of it. . . . I met a few people before because I used to go out there a bit, and they introduced me to a few more, so I knew a fair number. I knew that I would be all right.

If he had been given a choice in grade nine he probably would have stayed in the small school for his high school years, but he felt that there was a better selection of courses in the large school. He stated:

I probably would have stayed in because I wanted to go to the other school here but dad wanted me to go out there . . . because I was in that school before and I used to get into trouble, and there were a few more courses out there that they do not have here.

### **Impressions of the large school**

Ted had a very good first impression of the large school. He felt that it was great to have so many new people around to meet. He said:

In grade ten I had an all right time, in school, and it got me meeting new people which is nice to

do instead of having the same old friends all the time and hanging around with them all the time. It was a change, it was all right. . . . I thought it was good. Like I said before, I like a lot of people and there were a lot of people, and people I did not know, who I wanted to get to know. It was a big school with a big gym to play sports in. I thought it was going to be all right.

He found that there were some differences in teacher style to adjust to, but stated that for the most part, "school is school." He stated:

Some teachers have a different style, a different way of doing things. In math I was used to doing things one way, you would get the same answer, but I fooled up the first test I had because I did not have it the way I was supposed to have it. The rest was all the same. . . . During class everybody would be quiet, it was the same as if you were in a small school, a scattered person would be talking, that was normal. . . . Some classes had twenty five or thirty and others only had about ten or fifteen.

He stated that the biggest adjustment which he had to make was to get used to getting up so early in the mornings to catch the bus. He said, "I used to have to go to bed earlier. . . . I used to be pretty tired when I came home after school. Other than that everything was about the same." He reported that he had to do less work in the large school than he had been accustomed to doing in the small school. He stated:

The courses were much the same, I guess courses in grade nine were the same as courses out there. . . . I probably used to have more homework in grade nine than I do now. . . . Out there I think we did less work actually. If you have a sheet of questions you had to do four or five, where in the small school you would have to do eight or nine. In math he used to explain all period then give you ten or fifteen minutes to do what you could, and



then finish the rest for homework. I did not like that part but other than that it was all the same.

Ted felt that he had done well in his first year, academically, but his grades took a big drop, especially in biology and mathematics. He offered an explanation for his poor grade in mathematics. He stated:

. . . I did honours math and only got sixty something. In grade nine I got a ninety something average in math, and I figured I would be close to eighty five or ninety. I dropped right down and I did not expect that. . . . He explained all period then let you do your work, but I was used to doing my work in class and having it explained as I was doing it, like explain for ten minutes, go on and do my work, then explain for another ten minutes. I never used to do my homework so I only got sixty something.

In spite of his low mathematics and biology grades he articulated a belief that he had been well prepared for high school. He stated that the small school gave him as good a background as any other school would have. He found that there was not much difference in the courses between the schools. He said:

What we did in grade nine, grade ten followed up, like in science the things we did in grade nine were done in grade ten. The crowd from out here did the same thing so we were prepared.

Ted felt that when he arrived at the high school he knew as much as those students in his class who were from the large school system. He stated:

We would be all sat around and I would ask them a question and they would explain, and they would ask me a question and I would explain. We were all about the same. . . . There was about the same percentage of smart students so there were more out there because there were more students. . . . I was

in with the smart ones where I was doing the honours math, and language was tied in with that and I could keep up with them. I never got the highest marks by any means because there were a few naturally smart people in the class . . . but I was about average.

He expressed a belief that students from the large school system might have been more prepared, in that they knew the school and the teachers better than he did. He said:

I guess they knew the teachers so . . . if we took our teachers with us we would be more prepared and they would have to get used to the teachers. Since I have been in school I have had three different math teachers and every one of them taught differently, and it is hard getting used to it. . .

In some aspects of some courses he thought that he was more advanced than the students who had attended the large school system, and in others he felt that they were more advanced. He felt that the students' abilities all averaged out no matter where they were from, producing an even spread in the class. He stated:

Some things that we did in grade nine they did not do out there. There might have been a section in math that they did not do and there might have been a section that we did not do, so it all averaged out. . . . Like I said it depends on what you put into it. There are students from out there who got a lot higher marks than me, a lot who got a lot lower marks than me, and a lot who got about the same marks as me, so there was no difference in the schools.

### **Socialization**

Ted reported that he had assimilated into the social life of the large school very easily. He said that there was

some sticking together of different groups in the first year, but groups did mix a lot. He stated that people seemed to want to meet each other so there was a mixing of friends, no matter where you were from. He felt that new students in the large school were made to feel welcomed by most teachers, staff, and students. He stated that the school did what it could, and should, have done to make them feel welcomed. He did not think that they should have been treated any differently than other students in the school. He stated:

First when we came to school they had an assembly and welcomed everyone back, and they said our new students. They did not point you out or anything. . . . They never did anything special for you, put it that way. . . . There was no reason why they should treat us any more special than the rest of them. . . . During dinner hour a few of the teachers used to come up to us and ask us about the fish and things like that. A few used to talk to us.

Even though they were welcomed into the school Ted reported that students from the small school were often the first to be blamed if mischief was done in the school. He said that he could understand that, because they often were involved. He thought it was natural for the students from the small school to get into mischief occasionally since they were in the school all during lunch hour with very little to do. He was annoyed by a tendency of one teacher to use the small community which he belonged to as primarily bad examples when discussions were taking place in class. He stated:

This teacher, say we were discussing something, he would always use our town for examples, bad examples. . . . A couple of times I asked to use the washroom he would not let me go and then someone else asked and he let them go, things like that. . . . I think it started that way and I did not like that so when he would say something that I did not like I would not back down, I would keep it up.

He detected what he felt was some slight academic discrimination against him by one or two teachers, but felt that it could be because of a personality clash rather than where he was from. He stated:

I feel like sometimes I am discriminated against, but the teacher who I feel discriminates against me, like I do not like him and I know he does not like me. . . . There were a couple of teachers who, I think anyway, did not like people from our community. . . . I could tell by the way the person talked, one in particular, but there were two, who I do not think liked our town too well.

#### **Extra-curriculars and busing**

Ted had never been highly active in extra-curricular activities, although he was a moderately active participator in the small school. He reported that he had not joined many after school activities in the large school due to problems of finding transportation home, but added that stiff competition for places on teams was also a factor. He said:

I did not join any out there, not in the first year anyway. . . . The transportation was the problem. I could not get a ride. . . . I only liked one sport, volleyball, and I was only in grade ten and they had a lot of boys in grade twelve who were already going to be the starters, and I would have been sat on the bench all the time, so I did not bother. . . . In grade eleven I played volleyball.

Ted found that the bus trip did not bother him at all, and actually gave him an opportunity to socialize, but felt that it did eat into his personal time after school. He stated:

I just hate getting up in the mornings, other than that I do not care. . . . It is a laugh. I like to sit by myself in the mornings, but on the way back we all have a laugh. . . . When I was in grade ten I used to miss the evenings, where we were late getting home. . . . We are all there so we sit down and plan what we are going to do for the weekend.

### **Final reflections**

Ted felt that he had been successful in high school, but he was not totally satisfied with his grades, since they would not qualify him for entrance into university. He said:

I could have done better. . . . I only have about a sixty five or sixty seven average and that is not enough to get in university, I could have done better. I am not happy with my marks, but I deserved what I got, I suppose. Like I said, there is one teacher who I still say I should have done better.

He felt that "a school is a school and you do basically the same in them all". He thought that he would have done as well, or better, academically, if he had done high school in the small school, especially in mathematics. He stated that the teacher he had in the small school when he was in grade nine had been an important influence on what he had done in subsequent years. He said:

I would have done just as well, if not better . . . I think I would have done just as well. I found the teacher I had in grade nine to be the best teacher I ever had. I liked his teaching so I got

a good mark in his course. He had a good style and that is the style I liked, so that is the year I did the best. . . . It gave me a boost. If I had him in grades ten, eleven, and twelve math I think I would have done better. I am not knocking the teachers out there, I liked the way he taught.

Ted stated that on watching new students enter the large school for the first time, those who came from the small school seem very shy at first, but they very quickly get over that. He noted that the students who came from the small school seem more aggressive and more willing to buck the rules than those who came from the large system, once they have adjusted to the school. He stated:

It seems like the people from out there follow the rules a bit better. The only time the people from our town get in trouble is during dinner time when they are bored. . . . some of them are shy and look like a little girl or boy. . . . Those from our town act a little more shy because they do not know anyone.

When asked how long it took for students to settle into the new school he replied, "not very long, but I am just starting to fit in with everybody now. I fit in with the people I hung around with, but there were some people I did not know."

Ted would advise the new students entering the large school, from the small school, to stay out of trouble at the beginning to avoid getting a bad reputation with the teachers, and to work hard since more is required in high school courses than was required in the courses in the small school. He said:

Try not to get in trouble because I find that if you do something to one teacher they go in the staff room and they talk about you, that might be

the same in all schools right, and it seems like they are all watching out for you then. . . . Study a little harder because it is a big difference going from doing grade nine work to doing grade twelve work. I found grade nine pretty simple actually because there was not anything very complicated to do, but when you get in grade ten work, biology and math, that is pretty hard stuff.

Ted stated that he felt that students could achieve more in a large school than in a small school because of the diversity of offerings in the large school. He expressed a belief that a large school offers more opportunities. He stated:

You can stand out more in a small school if you are smart, but you could achieve more, I think, in a big school, because there are more chances to achieve things. Out there they have all kinds of chemistry and math exams. There are more scholarships out there in a big school than in a small school.

He stated the advantages of attending a small school as:

You get to know the teachers better, they know you and your first name. There are still some teachers out there who do not know my name. In the small school you get used to the way you are being taught.

He felt that the advantages of a large school were, "You get to meet more people and you have a lot more fun." He also pointed out that he believed the large school is better at preparing students for university. He said:

If you wanted to pursue a high up career in chemistry or physics you cannot get that in small schools. If you had no plans of ever going to university the large school has no advantage really.

Ted had never seriously considered leaving school before graduating. He stated that, "those who left school early

did so because they had families who had little value for education and friends who were a bad influence on them." He ended by stating his belief that it is the teacher who influences what a student does rather than a school.

### ***Conclusions***

The participants in this study had a wide range of perceptions of the transition from the small school to the large school. This is to be expected since they were all different individuals, took different courses, and had different interests, therefore they each had unique perceptions of this experience. There were some areas where there was wide agreement and some where only individuals identified perceived problems or advantages in making the transition. The next chapter summarizes the participants' perceptions of the transition from a small school to a large school and makes recommendations for action and further study.



## Chapter 5 - Summary and discussion

### *Introduction*

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and comment on the responses of the students to the questions which they were asked in the interviews. It can be noted that the experiences of the students in this study were quite diverse, since they had different interests, different social contacts, and chose to do different courses in the high school. As might be expected, their responses to the questions asked in the interviews were all somewhat different, although there were common themes.

### *Small school memories*

On being asked to remember their experiences in the small school all of the participants readily related memories of a close and friendly atmosphere. They remembered that the teachers in the small school were very familiar to them, and they had no hesitation in approaching them for help or to stay after school for extra activities. They contrasted that with a much more formal atmosphere in the large school, where they were not familiar with classmates, nor sufficiently familiar with teachers to ask them either for extra help or to stay for activities. Typical statements were:

All the teachers recognized you for who you were and the things you had done, while in the large school only some of the teachers got to know you. .

. . In the small school you had grown up with everyone in your class so you did not mind getting involved in things. . . . Everybody in the small school were friends. . . . There was just one large group in the small school who were all friends. . . . In the large school you may be a part of a team but people on the team are not all your friends. . . . You could ask a teacher to do anything for you here, and most of the time, if it was a sensible thing, they would try , but out there you do not feel that you could ask a teacher to do that unless they brought it up first.;

and

The teachers knew the students more in this school than they did out there, you could talk to teachers more and they helped you out more.

The relaxed atmosphere in the small school was fondly remembered. One student said:

The best thing about in class [in the small school] was it was relaxed most of the time. It was not really strict and you could turn around and get in groups, and if you did your work you could stay in groups. There was a lot of relaxing, talking, and joking in classes in this school and you can work better that way.

### ***Multi-grading***

Multi-grade classrooms were the standard in the small school, and students spent at least six of the ten years spent in that school in that classroom organization. It is an interesting commentary on that organization that some of the participants could not remember much about it. That could indicate that it was not a particularly stressful situation for those students. In fact, nine of the ten participants indicated that the multi-grade classrooms had not presented any particular problems for them. Five of the

nine reported that it was confusing at times and one stated that it was an inferior organization. Students made such comments as:

I did not find the multi-grade class too bad. From the time we started we were always together the same way, so we never really noticed what grade level book we were using. . . . It was all right for me, I found it all right.

In some classes the curriculum for the two grades in a multi-graded classroom was combined to create one program which all students in the class could study. It was typical to rotate programs so that in any given two years both programs would be done with all students, although some would get them in reverse order. Students did not find that to be any particular hardship stating such things as:

That was no problem, I thought it was better if the classes were combined. At least everybody was doing the same thing instead of two different things. . . . I did not really notice it because you just go through it.;

and

It is no different than grade ten doing grade twelve courses and we did that out in the large school. . . . You learn on your own with the teacher teaching you. . . . It was no big deal if you could do a grade eleven course in grade ten you could do a grade eight course in grade seven.

One student made the point that if the program for the higher grade in the class was to be used the lower grade students could be lacking prerequisite skills from the lower grade program, therefore find aspects of the program difficult. This point was well taken and deserves consideration when such arrangements are made for multi-grade classes. Two

students also pointed out that such arrangements could have presented problems for slower learners.

### *Anticipations of the large school experience*

The participants in this study had been attending the small school for ten years, and knew that they would be going to the larger school for high school. This knowledge caused them to anticipate the move long before their last year in the small school. They had been hearing stories about life in the large school from friends and older siblings, and felt that the move would be a kind of great adventure. All ten of the participants stated that they had really looked forward to attending the large school. Typical comments were:

I think everyone looks forward to going to the large school . . . all the new friends and everything, it is a big change. . . . Everyone was excited to go to the large school because it would be different. . . . One thing that I looked forward to was having a different teacher for every subject.;

and

I could not wait to leave. . . . You would hear all those stories about how easy you would get it and all the things you would get off with. . . . Things like if you did not want to go to class the teachers were not going to harass you and say things like get to class, or chase you around to see where you were. . . . If you did not want to do your work, fine, they did not care, if you did not do it, you did not do it. They said it was a lot easier, you could get away with practically murder out there, and all those things. . . . I could not wait to get out there.

It was also common for them to hear stories about a great social life in the large school, with dances and parties on

the week-ends. They would hear, "about what it was like on Friday and Saturday nights."

The academics in the large school was also a topic of many discussions between small school students and their friends who were attending the large school. They heard such things as, "I heard that courses were a lot harder out there. One girl told me that I would not believe the french course . . ." There were also those who heard the opposite, such as:

Mostly I heard that a lot of the courses were easy except for a few courses like biology and chemistry. . . . You could grasp them with just what was done in class, there was not much studying to it, except for the hard courses.

However, most of the students from the small school were told that the courses were more difficult than those they were used to. Seven of the ten participants anticipated more difficult academics in the large school.

Students making the move from the small school to the large school had a number of concerns, including how they would fit in socially and how they would handle the academics. The most prominent of their concerns was of social acceptance. Typical of their comments was the comment by one student that he was concerned about:

being able to fit in because people out there are totally different from people in here, there is a mixed bunch but in here everyone is all the same kind. . . . I did not know if I would fit in out there.

Six of the ten participants expressed such concerns, and one of them stated that he really expected students from other

communities to give him a rough time. He said, "I figured I would be picked on a lot and people would be saying things to me, just people with bad attitudes towards me."

### *First impressions of the large school*

Six of the ten participants reported feelings of alienation, and being scrutinized during their first few days in the large school. Students were not comfortable with the size of the building and number of people in their classes. Students' reactions to questions on such matters were generally:

The first day there you are walking around and you feel that everyone is staring at you, and you are a nervous wreck. . . . There is an awful crowd of people going there, because in the small school you walk down the hall and there would be a scattered person here and there, but out there you would have to work your way up through them and there were people just like ants, going all over the place. . . . People were going every which way and I had never seen any of them before. . . . The classrooms were a lot bigger and there were a lot more people in them. . . . If you wanted help you had to wait because seven or eight more people wanted help, but in here you just could go up to the teacher and he could help you right away.;

and

One big difference was the size of classes, and students from all high school levels mixed together in classes. Only a few would speak up, those in grade twelve because they did not care . . . I would not say anything and I will not say anything now in big classes.

They reported that once they got there they discovered that they did fit in well and were accepted quickly by the other students in the school, after a short adjustment period.

In the academics they found that there was not much difference between what they had done in the small school and what they were expected to do in the large school. One student said, The courses were much the same, I guess courses in grade nine were the same as courses out there."

Adjustments to the school seemed to cause a drop in grades for the students from the small school in their first year of high school, but after that they seemed to settle in and do fairly well.

#### *Academic adjustment and transition*

The participants did not perceive that the move from the multi-grade classrooms of the small school to the single-course classrooms of the large school represented a significant improvement in the teaching and learning situation in which they found themselves, and could have been the opposite. Students often perceived difficulties in obtaining individual assistance with work in class. Discussion on such matters generally elicited such statements as:

The classrooms were a lot bigger and there were a lot more people in them. . . . If you wanted help you had to wait because seven or eight more people wanted help, but in here you just could go up to the teacher and he could help you right away.;

and

I had to get used to the big classes . . . thirty people in a class, as compared to ten in here. . . . You did not like putting up your hand because you did not know anybody there . . . you just go on and do your work by yourself.

Six of the ten participants indicated that their work had not been monitored as closely in the large school as it had been in the small school. Typical comments were:

A lot of the teachers set an assignment and let you go, they did not really keep at you saying remember you have to have this in at a certain date. In the small school the teacher reminded you when you had to have it in, but out there they set it and if you did it, good enough, but if you did not you got no marks for it, they would not get on your back for it. . . . I was used to not having to remember a lot of things because the teachers would be right there telling me how to do it and when I had to have it done.;

and

Teachers [in the small school] always reminded you to do this or that, whereas out there they set it and then nothing else is said about it until time to have it done, and with homework if it is done it is done, and if it is not it is not. It had nothing to do with them, there was nothing coming out of their pay cheques. The way they saw it was, if you were not going to do the work on your own they were not going to have anything to do with you.

It is to be expected that in a larger school students will find themselves in larger classes and it will be more difficult for them to get as much individual attention as would be found in a class with only one third of the number of students. The lack of monitoring could be an indication that the teachers felt that, because they were in high school, students should take responsibility for their own work. That adjustment could be common to all students moving from junior high to high school.

All of the participants noted that the first year in the large school required them to make a big adjustment, and



consequently their academic grades suffered. The greatest adjustment was to new teachers and their teaching methods.

Participants stated:

I had to adjust to the new teachers out there because some teachers are stricter than others. . . . Teachers out there mark really hard during chapter tests, that is a great difference. . . . I got an overall average between seventy and eighty, which was a drop of ten or fifteen marks. . . . this was just the adjustment I think;

and

out there we had to get used to a different style of teaching. . . . I never got the marks that I was used to getting in the small school. When it came to things we had to learn . . . the way they used to teach things was hard to get used to. We were used to a certain way of teaching all the time but out there we had three or four different math teachers and they each had their own style of teaching.

Participants did not feel that there was the same atmosphere of caring in the large school as they were used to in the small school. One participant stated:

Out there a lot of teachers do not care. . . . They did not care. . . . They say that they care if you pass and things, but sometimes they give you things like they do not care if you are there after school or not . . . they do not say that but that is what they mean.

All ten of the participants in this study felt that they had been well prepared for high school, academically. They felt that they had as much knowledge as the students from the large school, and more in some subject areas. Mathematics was an exception, with the students reporting that they had some difficulty adjusting to doing the mathematics courses in high school. The participants made

statements like, "I knew that school is school and it is no different wherever you are. We got taught just as much in our school as they got taught out there. Whatever they knew out there I knew too.", and

In language we were way ahead. Things they never even heard of, I knew. We had done it in grade nine. Ways of writing sentences and things that they had never even touched we knew. . . . In science and social studies I found that we were about equal. They seemed to know more in math.

Another student said, "Actually I thought that we knew a lot more than they did. . . . When it came to things like science and social studies and things like that they did not have a clue." Such beliefs could have stemmed from the fact that, as one student believed, there were not as many courses offered in the small school but those that were offered were studied in greater detail. He said, "There was less variety to learn but what you did learn you learned well. Where the classes were small the teacher could stay with students who did not know something until they did."

#### *Social adjustment and transition*

One of the greatest benefits of attending the large school which the students anticipated before going there was the social life. They anticipated the great social life without thinking that it would require some effort on their part to fit into the social fabric of the large school. They did not realize how difficult it would be to enter a new, and strange, environment and make themselves a part of the social

fabric of that environment. Seven of the ten participants stated that the first year was difficult, and they stuck together as a group whenever it was possible in the large school. Common comments were:

In the first year I basically hung around with my friends from the small school, because I did not know anybody, so I said shag it . . . but now I know everybody out there. . . . Late in level one I started to feel more comfortable. . . . I go to dances out there every chance I get now, but at first I did not.;

and

At the first of the year most of the people from our community stuck together, but as the year went on they would each go with their own groups. . . . It was easier to go on your own.

It was very stressful on the students from the small school to deal with being immersed in such a different social situation. It seems understandable that students faced with a strange environment, populated mostly by people they did not know, would seek out those they knew and spend as much time with them as possible. It seems that such was the case with this group since they reported mixing more with other people in the large school once they got to know them, and they all reported that by the end of the first year in the large school they were fully assimilated into the social life of the school. Participants made statements like:

There were always groups, but as time went on you talked to more people from different communities and you still kept in your groups, but now everyone talks to everyone. . . . I guess you were more open towards people from your own community but you got along with people from all the other communities too. . . . They were just like you when you got to

know them. . . . Down in grade ten you still see groups like first when we came out here. . . . I guess it takes time to adjust.

All of the participants in this study indicated that efforts had been made by the staff of the large school to make them feel welcomed and at home there. They said there had been a welcoming assembly on the first day of school, teachers and administrators had made an effort to speak to them personally, and some teachers introduced them in classes. Common comments were:

The teachers I found really nice, they did not treat you any differently than the large school people, but the principal and vice-principal really made you feel welcomed. They had this big meeting with everyone and they were glad to see us there. On our orientation day [in the spring of their grade nine year] . . . the teachers made us feel really welcomed, because they wanted us to come out to their school.;

and

The teachers were good like that, and in class they would ask you questions to try to get you noticed in class, and when they made groups they would put you with people from other communities. . . . I do not think they could have done any more because it is such a big school.

However, it was mentioned by two students that in the large school it was not uncommon for teachers not to remember their names. One student said:

Some teachers do not remember your name, that used to piss me off a little bit because you are there four or five months and teachers do not know your name. . . . They just say you. . . . They are asking you questions and I do not even want to answer them when they do not know my name.

A major issue which came up during the discussion of the social life in the large school was that students from the small school had some feelings of being discriminated against. Nine of the participants in this study stated that they had no feelings of being discriminated against socially, by students. When asked if there had been discrimination between students from different communities a typical response was:

There were always groups, but as time went on you talked to more people from different communities and you still kept in your groups, but now everyone talks to everyone. . . . I guess you were more open towards people from your own community but you got along with people from all the other communities too. . . . They were just like you when you got to know them. . . . Down in grade ten you still see groups like first when we came out here. . . . I guess it takes time to adjust.

However, eight of the ten indicated that they had strong feelings of being discriminated against in respect to placement of blame for mischief done in the school. The students felt that when mischief was done in the school the first people suspected and questioned were those who had come from the small school. They admitted that students from the small school were prone to causing mischief, perhaps due to the length of time spent in the school during lunch hour with little to do, and they empathized with the teachers, but still felt that sometimes they were unfairly blamed, and even punished. In discussing this matter students made the following comments:

Back in grade ten stuff used to happen during school and most of the time the principal would call people from the small school, so I do not know . . . sometimes it felt like discrimination. . . . I remember last year when someone from that school did something and they called one person from the small school and blamed him for doing it, I knew the difference but did not say anything about it. That person kept on denying it so the teachers said okay, go on. . . . This person was a good student.;

The way they go about it, it is hard to say. . . . The fire alarm was pulled and someone from the large community did it, we know who it was, we saw her. They blamed us for it. Everything that is done out there we are usually blamed for, but there is a good reason why, because most things that are done out there are done by students from our community. Because of that we get blamed for everything, but not all the time for good reason . . . four of us got kicked out for flooding bathrooms and neither of us did it. . . . The principal said that he had to kick someone out, and we knew who did it, but I said so did everyone else in the school. What are you kicking us out for? He said he had to start somewhere and we had to eat our lunch outside for three days. He knew we did not do it too, that was not fair.;

and

The only thing I found was that if anything ever happened, something beaten up or anything, we used to always get the blame for it. . . . I guess they figured that because there were a lot of us who stayed in for dinner, but then again there were people from other communities who stayed in for dinner. Last year there were a lot of floods and things and the first ones they went to were us, some even got kicked out for dinner hours and they never had anything to do with it, I did not think that was fair. . . . I got in trouble once out there for doing something and ever since that other people have been doing it and the first one they will come to is me. . . . The same thing happened again the other day, they called me in the office. I can understand them thinking that if I did it once I would do it again, but still I think they should have asked around to see if they could find something out first.

One student made reference to a very subtle type of prejudice by students, which could be picked up only if a contentious issue arose with the students from the large school not getting the outcome which they desired. This student contended that as long as things were going smoothly, and the students from the large school saw things going as they thought they should, there was no indication of any bad feelings toward the students from the small school. However, if something did not go the way the large school students felt they should they very quickly indicated that the small school students had no business in their school anyway, and should go to school in their home town. This participant stated:

At the graduation we have a toast to the teachers and a toast to the parents, and two people from here got to do them, just by having their names picked, and the people [from the large school] in the graduating class thought that should not have been. . . . The feeling was what are they doing out here anyway, we do not want them in our graduation. . . . Where they all grew up together they think they should get to do everything rather than people who just came in. . . . You might not see it all along but when it comes down to certain things it is just right up in your face.

While most of the participants felt that they were not treated any differently than any other students in the large school, with respect to academics, four stated that they had felt academic prejudice in one or two courses. They conceded that those feelings could have been due to personality clashes with the teachers involved, but felt very strongly about it. A typical statement was:

I feel like sometimes I am discriminated against, but the teacher who I feel discriminates against me, like I do not like him and I know he does not like me. In this course I got the same mark all through the year, and if I gave my girlfriend my paper to hand in she would get eighty five, and if I passed it in I would say I would probably get seventy or seventy five. That is the mark I have been getting most of the way through the year. . . . There were a couple of teachers who, I think anyway, did not like people from our community. . . . I could tell by the way the person talked, one in particular, but there were two, who I do not think liked our town too well. There is one who towards girls he is all right and the other one is so so, but towards the fellows, well you know.

This could be the ramblings of students who have not done as well as they thought they should have in a course, while again it could be an indication of a serious problem. While discussing this issue one student also said that he noticed that one teacher in particular often used the small community which he came from as bad examples in class discussions, and that had a tendency to upset him. The students seem remarkably willing to accept the blame for such problems, and are very quick to explain them away as personality clashes.

### ***Extra-curricular participation***

Extra-curricular participation is an important part of the school life of students, and while in the small school the participants in this study were offered a wide range of opportunities for participation. All ten reported having been involved in extra-curriculars, with eight reporting a high level of involvement. Participants made such comments as:



I did not take part in much sports but I participated in other clubs like science club, choir, and guitar club. There were a lot of things offered for you to do, but whatever I felt was interesting to me that's what I did.;

and

I remember mainly the after school, mainly the sports. I could get in the sports because I was in the same town, so I could get access to the sports a lot better here, and a lot of times teachers would say, "okay we will go down for fun," that was about the most I can remember about here. . . . I took part in volleyball, basketball, table tennis, computers, and science club. . . . I stayed in school almost every day after school almost ever since I had been here, except when I was in the lower grades.

In contrast, they did not participate nearly as much in the extra-curricular life of the large school. Of the ten participants six stated that they had not been involved in extra-curriculars in the large school. They said that the main reason for their lack of participation was transportation problems, because they were bused to school and the bus left immediately after school. Of the four who had gotten involved three stated that the busing had made it difficult for them to maintain their participation. Typical comments were:

I do not think I ever joined anything out there. . . . Transportation was the big problem, because where dad worked he used to have to go to work and I could not get him to come and pick me up.;

and

I joined the table tennis team and the badminton team. . . . Busing caused problems because if I did not come home on the bus dad had to come and get me, and that was hard on dad. . . . Dad gets off work at four o'clock and as soon as he got off work

he had to drive all the way out there and home again. . . . I got involved anyway.

Students also raised the point that there had been a lot of competition for positions on sports teams in the large school. They had not been used to having to compete for positions on teams, since in the small school numbers were small enough that any student who wanted to join a team could, no matter about his/her playing ability. It had been a philosophy of the small school that all students who were interested in sports got the opportunity to play. In the large school students could have been left off teams due to playing ability, or been discouraged from trying out due to their perception of stiff competition.

### *Busing*

Students from the small school being studied were bused thirty kilometres, one way, each day to attend the large school. This trip represented a thirty to forty minute drive on a crowded bus each morning, and again in the afternoon. When questioned on how they found that bus trip each day seven of the ten participants indicated that they found it very difficult. Since they had to be at the bus stop at seven forty five each morning it necessitated a very early rise, and combined with the trip home in the afternoon extended their day by one and one half hours. The most often stated complaint about the busing was that it was very tiring. It was stated that the intolerable noise was very

energy draining and could even affect a student's ability to concentrate in class during the day. On this topic students made such comments as:

To go to the large school I have to get up two hours earlier than I had to come here, which means I have to watch how late I stay up a lot more, and I am really dropping when I get to school. The bus really drains your energy a lot. You are just sitting there for a half hour. I have gotten up mornings and felt okay and got on the bus and riding out I get bored. The first little while you are excited about it so you do not notice it, then it is something you have to do, and now lately it seems pretty bad. It seems like the new crowd who are on the bus this year are really loud. . . . When you are getting out of school you know in your mind that you have a half hour to a hour before you get home. We have no time after school to do something before supper, so we are losing a lot of our time away from school. . . . Getting rides costs you money.;

and

I hate it, can not stand it, I would rather walk. . . . It made you tired because it was very hot on the bus and you got groggy and lazy, then when you got to school it took a couple of periods before you woke up again. Now it is not so bad because there are not as many people this year and it is more comfortable. . . . I could never do any work on the bus because when you hit a bump your books would go all over the place. . . . On the way home you get very tired . . . you do not get much time to yourself during the week.

Of the three who said that they did not find the bus trip too bad one stated that the time could be used to catch up on studies, or to do a little extra preparing, one said that it provided a social opportunity, and one may have been accustomed to bus travel, since he had been bused to the small school from the time he began school.

During discussions on the busing another related topic was introduced by the students. There was no cafeteria service in the large school, and they found that it was particularly difficult to adjust to the type of lunches they had to eat and the conditions in the lunch room. Students missed being able to go home to a hot lunch and a relaxing atmosphere in the middle of the day. A typical comment is:

I used to miss dinners because when I was home I would go home to something hot but out there you have to take sandwiches every day, . . . and [I missed] eating in peace, because out there about sixty people are eating in one room and there would be chip bags and paper bags going everywhere. . . . You had to have your back to the wall.

The difficulty of going from the home environment to a crowded room where the meals were monotonous can be appreciated. One student stated that he did not eat in the school if there was any way that he could avoid it.

#### ***Pertinent individual points***

There were a number of interesting comments made by individual participants, which are worthy of mention. Owen outlined the fact that the small school was right in their community and there was a feeling of ownership. He described how important it was to him that he had planted trees near the school and took pride in contributing to the school and his community. He stated that even now, three years after leaving the school, he returns to check on the progress of his trees. He said there were no such feelings of pride in

the large school for him, and no reason to want to go back and visit it once the school day was out.

Trudy and Ted agreed that it was the personal relationships with other students, and especially with teachers, which makes a school special, rather than the configuration of the school itself. Trudy said, "The teacher-student relationship is the main thing, I think, and the relationships overall because you know everyone. That always has something to do with how you are doing in school." Ted stated:

I do not think the small school has anything to do with changing, the only thing I say is if you get used to a teacher. . . . no matter where you go to school you still have to adjust to the teachers. . . . I do not see big classes or anything because if you are going to do your work you are going to do your work.

Evan and Eileen mentioned the fact that there were a lot of facilities and equipment in the large school, but it was not as accessible as the facilities were in the small school. Because of the numbers of people wanting access to the facilities in the large school it was much more difficult to get to use them. It was common practice in the large school to allow only those students who were doing courses which used specialized facilities to have access to those facilities. Evan stated:

You do not get down in the gym as much because there are only a few of us for dinner and there are not that many people to go down to the gym. I heard about all the computers they had out there . . . but you are not allowed to play games on them;

and Eileen said:

Here we used to have music classes and art classes, and things like that, whereas out there if you wanted anything to do with music you had to join the band, or if you wanted to use any of the art things or the computers you had to be taking computer or art classes. You just could not go over to the art room or to the computers and use it, you had to be in one of the classes, whereas here you could just go on and use things if you wanted to. . . . If you wanted to go down to the music or art room you had to get permission for some special reason.

Both Evan and Nelson mentioned that the small school had more field trips and special activities. The small school would make it a point to take students outside the community for one or two trips each year, as well as putting on a wide range of special events for education week. Evan stated, "I liked the activities. We used to go on trips during the year and we would always be going for sports and things. Out there we may go on one trip a year". Nelson said:

Not many things go on there, like for education week, here we used to do a lot of things but out there, there is just one assembly and that is it. . . . In here teachers used to sometimes go over to the drug store and pick up a movie for us to watch for the afternoon, but there was nothing like that out there. . . . We got everything done that had to be done. . . . When we were here everyone did their work and made sure that it was done, they worked harder, but out in the high school people would be sitting there doing nothing. I do not think they got half as much done. . . . Here we made time for both of it.

This could represent a common difference between elementary and high schools. Since in the small school junior high was the high end of an elementary school while in the large school it was the low end of a high school, the difference in

trip and activity levels could reflect the different philosophies of the school levels.

### ***Final thoughts***

During the interviews the participants clearly identified what they felt were the advantages of the small school as well as the advantages of the large school. They also indicated what their choice of schools would have been, if they had been given the opportunity to choose, in light of their present knowledge of the schools. All ten participants stated that the advantages of the small school were that it provided a close and friendly atmosphere, where it was easy to obtain individual attention. Typical comments were:

Going to school in a small school you get help from the teachers, a lot of help. Teachers are always checking on you making sure you have your work done and you always know every one in the school. You are all together like one family helping each other out and things.;

and

You know the teacher more, you know their methods, you know all the people and you know everything about them, classes are smaller, and the atmosphere is more relaxed.

All ten participants agreed on the advantages of the large school as well. They felt that a large school could offer a greater variety of social opportunities and a wider range of course choices. Typical of the responses to this question were:

You get to meet more people and you have a lot more fun. . . . If you wanted to pursue a high up career

in chemistry or physics you cannot get that in small schools. If you had no plans of ever going to university the large school has no advantage really.;

and

You have a lot more freedom . . . you get choice of your own courses . . . you get a break every period, and it is a good social life if you are easy going. . . . There are a whole lot of people for you to meet and a whole new life, almost. . . . There are more courses too. . . . I took as many practical courses as I could, except those I had to do. . . . I did not think I was going to get that much freedom.

One student made an interesting observation in respect to the differences between the schools. He noted that in the small school they were confined to the small community and did not experience the broad range of ideas on such things as career choices. He pointed out that being exposed to more social contacts had a tendency to open up the minds of students from the small school to a broader range of possible choices, whereas in the small community many people thought the same way. He said:

You hear students talking about what they are going to do after they finish school and here almost everyone has the same attitude about what they are going to do when they finish school, but you see what all those other people are going to do and you compare yourself to them and it makes you look at what you are going to do. It helps you a lot.

When asked to look over their whole school experience and assess whether they would have done better to remain in a small school for their entire schooling or to go to the large school as they had done, participants had mixed feelings. They felt that they would not have had as many course choices



in the small school, but of the courses they could get they would have attained higher grades. However, they felt that the large school offered a much more varied and interesting social atmosphere, which helped them to develop social skills needed in life. Typical of their comments on this was:

I know my marks were better here so my marks probably would be better if I had stayed, but socially I do not know, it would be a hard decision. . . . I think I would have probably done a little better [in the small school] because there would not have been that big change to a different school and different teachers, I was used to those teachers all along and the only thing that would be the problem would be the subject itself, but the teachers made it seem a little easier so I think I would have done a little better [in the small school]. . . . You learn leadership, I guess, [in the large school] because you do not know anyone so you have to get up and be willing to speak out in front of the class.

All ten said they could have done as well or better academically if they had done high school in the small school, in terms of grades. Eight of the ten qualified that by stating that they got better social development in the large school, due to the variety of experiences offered. Five of them said that the large school prepared them better for post-secondary education. One participant stated:

If I keep going like I am going now I will do better than I probably would have in here, because out there they better prepare you for public exams. I have heard people who graduated from the other school here [a small school] say that when the time came to write their public exams they did not have a clue how to do anything, they had a level of knowledge but they did not have the full idea. . . . I am better prepared for exams later on. . . . I Probably would have done well on tests, but when it came time to write public exams my marks probably would have gone down, and I probably would have

come back for an extra year. There was a guy from here who went out to the large school and was not doing very well so he came back here to the other school and he got the highest marks in his class, but when he wrote his public he bombed out.

It is interesting to note that nine of the ten participants in this study said that they would choose the large school for their high school years again, if they had the choice to make over. Even though they felt that their academic grades would have been better in the small school they felt that wider course choices and a broader range of social opportunities allowed the large school to give them a better all round education. Two of the students made the observation that the experience of adjusting to a larger school once better prepared them for future similar adjustments. One of them said:

If I had been given the choice in grade nine I would most likely have stayed, but after being there I would rather to have been there for the last three years, because next year I am going to have to go to an even bigger place, and if I had stayed here and had to go from a small school to university it would have been a really big shock. Now that I have adjusted to a bigger crowd once it will probably be easier the next time. . . . I think it was a lot better that I went out there.

Each participant was asked what advice he/she would give to students from the small school who are about to attend the large school. All participants would advise them to work hard at their studies, since courses are more demanding in high school. Of the ten participants, three placed emphasis on advising students to try to fit into the social life of

the large school as soon as possible. Typical responses were:

When you go out there do not sit back at first without going up and talking to people, because the longer you wait the worse they will think of you, but even if you go up to someone and ask where something is at least you have started talking to them. That is what I did the first time I was out there and the next time I saw them they talked to me . . . then it was all right. In class always try your best at the beginning so that the teachers will see that you are not a trouble maker and they will accept you right away.;

and

Try not to get in trouble because I find that if you do something to one teacher they go in the staff room and they talk about you, that might be the same in all schools right, and it seems like they are all watching out for you then. . . . Study a little harder because it is a big difference going from doing grade nine work to doing grade twelve work.

#### ***Recommendations for action***

This examination of student perceptions of the transition from a small school to a large school has revealed some rather expected and, on the other hand, some rather startling perceptions. Student expectations of life in the large school were rather inaccurate, they did not feel familiar enough with the teachers in the large school to ask them questions, social adjustment was difficult in the first year, busing and lunches were difficult, extra-curricular activities were difficult to participate in, and some felt discriminated against by being first blamed for wrong doing.

In light of those perceptions a number of recommendations for action can be made:

1. The large school should make a stronger effort to inform students graduating from the small school about the large school, its course offerings, and its social atmosphere.
2. Time should be made for new students to socialize with the teachers and students in the large school and become familiar with them before getting down to the serious business of the year's work.
3. An effort should be made to create a more pleasant eating atmosphere in the large school, to make it more relaxing and enjoyable for the students.
4. An effort should be made to offer a range of extra-curricular activities during the lunch hour when the small school students are in the school with little to do. Maybe even some team practices could be held at that time.
5. An investigative procedure should be put in place to be followed whenever mischief is done in the school. If a just procedure is followed each time an incident of that nature occurs, and is applied to all students equally

it could alleviate this feeling of discrimination within one group.

***Recommendations for further study***

It is also recommended that a broader study be done into the impact on students of the transition from small schools to large schools, that a study be done into the effects of busing on student achievement, that a study be done on perceptions of discrimination between social groups within schools, and that a study be done on extra-curricular participation by students who are bused to large centralized schools.

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## Appendix

The superintendent

Dear Sir:

As you are aware, I am presently doing graduate studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am now in the process of beginning a thesis, under the supervision of Dr. Dennis Mulcahy, in which I hope to study students' perceptions of the impact of their small school experiences on high school achievement. The small school-large school system in your district provides an excellent opportunity to do this study, since students attend the small school from kindergarten to grade nine and then take their high school education in the large high school. I am hoping to interview this year's level III students, who came from the small school to get their observations on this topic. I anticipate one taped interview of approximately one to one and one half hours duration with each student.

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of my desire to do this study in your district and to ask for your permission to do so. In asking this I am aware that I will need to contact the parents of the students who may be involved and obtain their cooperation in working with their children. Participation is voluntary and children may withdraw at any time, or refrain from answering any questions which he or she prefers to omit. This study has received the approval of the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee. I also assure you that school, district, and individual anonymity will be respected, if such permission is granted. At the conclusion of the study all tapes will be destroyed.

If you grant permission for me to conduct this study in your district I will make all results of my work available to you, and anyone at your district office. I will also make it available to the schools, parents, and students involved. I assure you that I will respect the dignity of your district, schools, parents, and students. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at 535 8447. If at any time you wish to talk with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Patricia Canning, Associate Dean, Research and Development, at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours truly,

Chris Vincent

Dear Parents:

As you may know, I am presently doing graduate studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am asking your cooperation and consent for your child                      to take part in a study, which is a part of my graduate program, and is supervised by Dr. Dennis Mulcahy. The main purpose of this research is to study students' perceptions of the impact of their small school experiences on high school achievement. This study has received the approval of the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee. To gather information about that topic I will need to interview the students who are in level III. I expect that one interview of about one to one and one half hours duration will be sufficient.

In this interview I will be asking the students if they feel that their education in a small school made it more difficult for them to do well in high school, and whether they found it difficult to fit into the social life of the high school. I will also talk to them about their plans for future education. An important part of the interview will also be a discussion of their feelings about the nature of their education, and how they think the education system could be changed to better meet the needs of the students. It is hoped that their feelings and ideas will help to improve the school system.

The interviews will be audio taped, but I assure you that the students' names will not be used anywhere in the study and all audio tapes will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. If you, as parents, wish to accompany your child to the interview you are welcomed to do so. Participation is voluntary and children may withdraw at any time, or refrain from answering any questions which he or she prefers to omit. If you have any further questions please contact me at 653 2245 or 535 8447. If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Patricia Canning, Associate Dean, Research and Development, at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

I would greatly appreciate it if you would return the consent sheet below to me, in the envelope provided, by                     .

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Yours truly,

Chris Vincent

I \_\_\_\_\_ (parent/guardian) hereby give my consent for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in a study on the impact of early education in a small school on high school achievement, conducted by Chris Vincent. I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that my child and/or I can withdraw permission at any time. All information is strictly confidential and no individual will be identified.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's/Guardian's signature

Large school principal

Dear Sir:

As you are aware, I am presently doing graduate studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am now in the process of beginning a thesis, under the supervision of Dr. Dennis Mulcahy, in which I hope to study students' perceptions of the impact of their small school experiences on high school achievement. This small school-large school system provides an excellent opportunity to do this study, since students attend the small school from kindergarten to grade nine and then take their high school education in the large high school. I am hoping to interview this year's level III students, who came from the small school to get their observations on this topic. I anticipate one audio taped interview of approximately one to one and one half hours duration with each student.

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of my desire to do this study in your school and to ask for your permission to do so. The district superintendent and parents of the students involved have been contacted for their permission. Participation is voluntary and children may withdraw at any time, or refrain from answering any questions which he or she prefers to omit. This study has received the approval of the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee. I also assure you that school and individual anonymity will be respected, if such permission is granted. At the conclusion of the study all audio tapes will be destroyed.

If you grant permission for me to conduct this study in your school I will make all results of my work available to you, and anyone at your school. It will also be available to the parents, and students involved. I assure you that I will respect the dignity of your school, parents, and students. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at 535 8447. If at any time you wish to talk with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Patricia Canning, Associate Dean, Research and Development, at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Yours truly,

Chris Vincent









